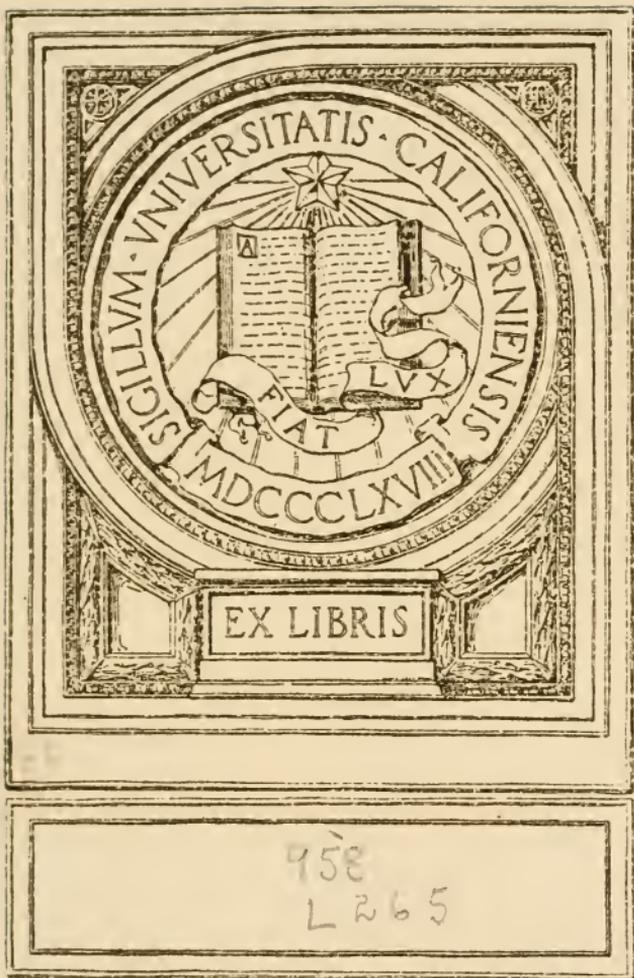


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The Town*

*By M<sup>rs</sup> JOHN LANE*



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THE TOWN

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THE  
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TO  
EDITH LOUNSBERY



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# TALK OF THE TOWN

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## The Tyranny of Clothes

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**C**LOTHES and all their little accessories are without doubt the invention of the devil. After that historic interview in the Garden of Eden, in which Adam, though the first man on earth, emphatically proved that he was not the first gentleman, it was the serpent who in one last frantic effort to annihilate the human race reached the climax of wickedness by introducing fashions into this peaceful world. And as he was on exceedingly bad terms with the lady of the Garden, it is natural enough that he made the new fashions dreadfully trying to her, and so they have remained ever since. Along with the fashions the serpent at the same time bestowed on us our profound reverence for the Unim-

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portant, and inculcated in us that supreme article of faith, "Judge every one by his clothes." And, to be honest, so most of us do!

But clothes, like everything else, have succumbed to the democracy of the age. Once people dressed according to their trade or their rank, but in these days that has all disappeared except in legends and the Earl's Court Exhibition. Instead, the world has one universal costume which for men consists of a top hat, ready-made tie, ready-made garments and giraffe collar, and these form the crown and summit of poetic fancy, and have made their triumphant way to the uttermost parts of the earth.

They have astonished the polar bear gambolling in the icy north, while in the south they have reached those blameless savages who, in their efforts to compete with civilisation, simply and unostentatiously array themselves, if in nothing else, at least in the top hat of a bygone fashion contributed by the righteous.

The top hat represents the universal language of attire. It wails and weeps

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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against the walls of Jerusalem, and it turns up in the solitudes of the desert ; even the loneliest mountain peaks are not safe from its democratic simplicity. Once I met a silk hat, probably rescued from some benevolent dust-bin, milking a cow in a London park. The hat nearly caused a riot ; each and every passer-by turned and stared indignantly. The eccentric cowboy in the top hat finished his allotted task, and in company of his cow and the milk-pail ambled placidly out of sight. Still, one can't help asking, in the interest of personal liberty, why shouldn't a silk hat be permitted to milk a cow ? The cow doesn't mind, so why should we ? After all, it's only a convention !

The other day I was at a garden-party, and there I realised, as perhaps never before, the appalling nature of the top hat. It is only custom that has reconciled us to its ponderous monstrosity. In towns one accepts it as one does motor-buses and traction engines, but when it meanders among trees, and does the polite with sloppy ices, or tea that spills its way to its destination, one's soul cries out against it.

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Then, too, there is the bowler hat ! I shall never forget two bowler hats tilted back against an ancient yew tree, so old that it is mentioned in the Domesday Book, while the well-meaning gentlemen under the hats smoked huge cigars and were quite unconscious of what a blight they were on the quiet English scene. Really, one owes a duty to the landscape !

There are things, it is a comfort to know, which even a man cannot do, and a man is supposed to be able to do almost anything. Now a novelist may put his heroine's hat on her head at any angle he chooses—it is one of the few privileges of womanhood—and leave her not a bit less charming or dignified, but I defy him to put his hero's hat at a rowdy angle over his ear at a crucial point in his career, and leave him still heroic ! The Achilles heel of a man is his hat. He must guard that as he does his reputation, for it is at once his strength and his weakness.

It would hurt an archbishop—and an archbishop necessarily stands for all that is good and great—less in the eyes of the public to commit a crime than to wear his

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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hat on the back of his sacred head so that the brim forms a halo—and thus exhibit himself to his distressed diocese. He may have all the known virtues, and many that are not known, but even an archbishop cannot with impunity defy convention. Still, if he is so inclined, why should not a good and great man wear his hat even over his nose without creating unfavourable comment? The fact is he cannot. He is ruled by convention, and convention is the red-tape of society.

The cast-iron laws of fashion, which is only another name for convention, are such that if the greatest man in England were to walk with all his accustomed dignity from the Marble Arch to the Bank with a trailing peacock's feather attached to the band of his immaculate silk hat, he would be followed by a mob in two seconds, and by the time he reached Vere Street the outraged majesty of the law would take him into custody as a suspicious character. Every policeman is an arbiter of fashion. To him any originality in clothes means either crime or insanity. You may be a very, very great man in-

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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deed, but you are not great enough to defy convention.

It is the aim of all human creatures to look alike. If it were not so, each would dress as he pleased. As it is, we spend half our life trying to look like everybody else. How monotonous the world would be if it were only full of human beings ! The sameness of their clothes is only equalled by the sameness of their expression, or, rather, their want of expression. To have no expression is the aim of the highest civilisation, and it is our proud boast that we represent the highest civilisation. There is, also, nothing so vulgar as to show one's feelings. In fact, to be conspicuous is nearly a crime, and for this reason we so frantically pursue the fashions.

It is humiliating to think how the world wastes its limited and precious hours in considering its clothes rather than its immortal soul. How short even is the time we devote to our intellects compared to the time we devote to our wardrobes ! Now is it not absurd to expect us poor women, who madly pursue the fashions, —and whose trials are like the rock of

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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Sisyphus which never reached the summit—to attain even the intellectual plane of that other descendant of Adam whom fashion requires to look like nothing more poetic than an animated stove-pipe?

Think of the years he has saved! In those cycles of time, when he was not required to match colours, and choose fabrics and fashions, with a conscientious eye to economy, he was usefully employed in cultivating his mind. Now how can we poor martyrs to clothes compete with him? It isn't that we haven't the intellect, it is simply that we haven't the time! Abolish the tyranny of clothes and see how great we women can become!

But here observe what we are pained to be obliged to call the duplicity of men. They do not wish us to be on an intellectual level with themselves, and it is for this reason that they create the fashions on which our intellects wreck! For it is not women but men who four times a year so cruelly tell us what to wear and how to wear it; and just when we think we can take breath, man decrees a new fashion, and the awful chase begins again. Eve is

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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probably the only woman on record who could dress just as she pleased, and for that reason she is the only woman we know of since the world began who had leisure to cultivate her mind.

To think of the amount of time a woman wastes on her clothes ! Why, if men were to spend as much time at their tailors or buying their neckties, the world's work would never be done. So one would modestly suggest to those pioneers who are working for the advancement of women that they should first abolish the wicked tyranny of clothes. After that women will occupy any position they may choose.

One must acknowledge that nature sets us a rather bad and frivolous example in the matter of one sex putting on pretty things for the edification of the other. In his *Descent of Man* Darwin alludes to the fine feathers of the rooster who takes this way to make himself irresistible to the susceptible hens. Once, during a periodical cleaning of our library, I came in unexpectedly and found that the housemaid had paused in her dusting, and was reading this particular passage aloud to our old

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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cook who had come up from the kitchen to lend a helping hand, and who shook a reproachful feather-duster at her.

“ You just shut that book up,” cook cried in outraged propriety to the blushing housemaid. “ He’d oughter be ashamed of himself saying such things.” By which she meant the great Darwin. Since then, by an odd association of ideas, I always connect virtue with a feather-duster.

In the case alluded to by Darwin, it is, of course, the rooster who is decorated by alluring feathers, while among human beings it is usually the feminine creature who is arrayed in all the colours of the rainbow for the same purpose for which nature gives the rooster his magnificent tail-feathers and his flamboyant comb. Not that the human rooster is above making himself attractive by a judicious application of outward decoration, far from it, on the contrary; but his choice of personal adornment is mercifully restricted by sober modern fashion, with the result that he has time to govern, to fight battles, to earn his bread and butter, and to devote some attention to science, art, and litera-

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ture. Even in the past, when he was more decorative, he was spared the trial of constructing his own decorations.

When one looks back on one's life—one's feminine life—it is melancholy to realise how much of one's troubles are owing to one's clothes. I remember the despairing cry of a woman, looking hopelessly through her wardrobe: "I should have been a better woman if I had been born with feathers!"

How well I knew just what she meant! She was examining disconsolately a shabby white satin dress—the kind of satin that betrays its plebeian cotton origin—"I wish I were a guinea-hen with respectable speckled feathers," she cried, as she gave a discouraged slam to the wardrobe door, "then I wouldn't use up three-quarters of my intellect getting the wrong things cheap!"

The horrible tyranny of clothes no matter how solemn the occasion! We are not permitted to mourn except in black cloth and crape. It would be most indecent in us to break our hearts in our ordinary clothes. Are we not obliged to pause in

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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our anguish to have our mourning tried on ? If we should clothe our breaking hearts in red we would become a byword and a reproach ; and yet how much unaffected joy has been covered by the most expensive kind of crape. I never could understand why bugles, the dull kind, should be so popular among the afflicted, nor why it is considered right and proper to be garlanded—under such distressing circumstances—by all the flowers that grow, only they must be black !

There is one day a week sacred to clothes. On that day one can't escape their baleful tyranny. That is, of course, Sunday. Who has not been kept from attending Divine service when it rained, by a hat that refused to get wet ? Who has not suffered under the tyranny of an out-of-date dress that simply revolted against being seen in church ? Yes, Sunday clothes are the most tyrannical in the world ! Sometimes, of course, a garment gets self-righteous, and clamours to be seen in the sanctuary, and who, my weak sisters, can refuse the coaxing of one's prettiest dress when it implores to be taken to church ?

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On the other hand, it takes a heroic woman to go to church in anything but her best. It is, apparently, impossible to get one's mind in a fitting religious condition unless one's clothes can triumphantly sustain the scrutiny of the righteous. Whoever heard of a right-minded woman going to church in her old clothes? And who has not heard that familiar reproach, "My dear, you really can't go to church; you haven't anything fit to wear!" And yet, who has not owned some perfectly fitting dress which has given its wearer on a Sunday that sense of peace and holy contentment which it is not in the power of the sermon to bestow?

Of course, there are some heroic souls who don't mind going to church in the rain, but on inquiry it will be found that it is always in their "second best." Now the tyranny of the "second best" is a mellowed despotism.

It is very interesting to follow the religious feminine mind when dealing with articles of attire. I remember a very pious lady of our acquaintance who had a terrible weakness for hats. She could not see a

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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new hat without its being engraved on her memory, clamouring to be reproduced. On Sundays she went devoutly to church surrounded, so to speak, by a kind of St. Anthony's temptation of hats. Did she succumb? Not a bit of it. Indeed, she once severely rebuked a young unregenerate who had allowed her attention to wander from the sermon to the hat of a very smart sinner. We felt the reproof bestowed on us in rather acid tones so acutely that we chewed our Sabbath roast-beef in contrite silence. However, the next day being Monday and sacred to nothing in particular, then were the flood-gates of memory opened, and the righteous one favoured us with a detailed account of every hat within range of her pew, with an estimate of its possible cost and its probable age.

"Where," the unregenerate one cried awestruck, as we finally met under the hat-rack, "where was her mind during the sermon?" Where indeed?

Now this is what the learned mean when they try to describe sub-consciousness. Sub-consciousness is the precious faculty bestowed on a privileged few of hearing the

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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sermon and at the same time studying the hats.

Who of us has not suffered under the awful tyranny of a ball-dress? A tyrant that simply won't give one any peace until it has been taken to a dance when one really ought to have been in bed with a mustard plaster on one's chest? I have known a tulle dress—the sweetest and most innocent-looking thing in the world—go out on an icy-cold winter night—would go, you know!—and kill the girl inside. The cruelty of clothes! And it is the frail ethereal kind that are the most dangerous. I daresay, if we had statistics, we would find them mainly responsible for the prosperity of the medical profession.

To refer to another part of one's wardrobe. Probably nothing in our human attire can contain such an amount of concentrated suffering as a pair of tight boots. It is a part of their refinement of cruelty that these tyrants, when moving in society, require one to suffer with a smiling face. Cinderella's sisters, who in turn chopped off a heel and a toe in their efforts to capture the prince, are common enough

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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everywhere. Slippers have a great deal to answer for! The other day a pair with very high heels, and in the immoral company of openworked stockings, got themselves preached against. But, of course, we know who would get the best of that!

It is a great comfort to feel that, though in a lesser degree, man also suffers from the tyranny of clothes. Even more than a woman he is the victim of clothes that won't go together. Show me that great and independent man who would dare to walk down Piccadilly in a frock-coat and straw hat, or disturb the severe propriety of the scene by wearing a silk hat and a Norfolk jacket?

What heroic soul, not a waiter, would venture forth in the early morning in his evening clothes? There is, however, one thing in which man is supremely blessed, in whatever else his clothes may be deficient, and that is pockets. Again I assure those feminine pioneers, who clamour for their rights, that above everything else they should demand an equality of pockets. Instead of asking for the right to vote, demand pockets. If granted, it would pro-

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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bably have such an amazing effect on women's intellects that in time they might, possibly, become equal to men's.

Just consider ! The most ordinary kind of man has at least a dozen pockets, while a woman of transcendent intellect generally has none, or if she has one, it is where she can't get at it. Now try to imagine a man doing his errands with a purse, handkerchief, and shopping list in one hand, the tail of his skirt in the other, his umbrella under one arm, meanwhile making an effort to keep his head clear for business problems, and at the same time keeping a wary eye out for motors. He couldn't do it ! There really is no doubt that man owes his superiority to women entirely to his pockets. One would like to urge the distinguished champions of the cause of women to demand a law requiring each woman to have a dozen pockets. What splendid service they would do their bothered sex ! For once provided with pockets, our intellects, for the first time since the Garden of Eden, would be free to expand.

Though a man does not suffer under the tyranny of clothes so much as a woman,

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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yet it is only the exceptional man who has the courage of his clothes, and who would venture on any independence in dress. The laws that govern him are so simple and yet so rigid. There are certain conventions he would not defy, not even for a V.C. A woman will, if she has a great and cheeky soul, rejoice to come out in something awfully daring—that is, if she is perfectly sure of herself—but what man would have the heroism to do that ?

There have been certain great historic characters who have set the fashions, and who have immortalised themselves by aid of a necktie, the curve of a silk hat, or the cut of a waistcoat, but these are lonely instances, and the exceptions that prove the rule. No, no man is ever heroic about his clothes ; but such instances of liberty as he does enjoy are, to be quite just, entirely due to the bold Americans. Columbus discovered America, but the Americans discovered the straw hat. It is a question which discovery has been of the most vital importance.

There is nothing an Englishman so much dreads as to be conspicuous ; to be notice-

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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able above his fellow men is his horror. For this reason he loves convention. For this reason, too, no man in the world is so well-dressed as the Englishman ; it helps him to pass unnoticed, and so his correct soul is at peace. Even the artists of the divine arts in Great Britain have so succumbed now to the prevailing tyranny that a poet cannot be distinguished from a prosperous stockbroker. And yet there seems to be no real reason why a man must approach the Muses in a velvet coat, long hair, and a flowing necktie. How reluctantly the Englishman resigned himself to the picturesque inelegance of the slouch hat ; and there was a time, not so very long ago, when no self-respecting silk hat would permit itself to climb to the top of a bus.

But, oddly enough, though the Englishman is the most conventional of men, he is, also, the most unconventional. It is dangerous to judge him by his clothes even if one is so inclined. There is a class punctilious to tears about their coats and hats, but it is far from being the most distinguished. The Englishman is not only the apotheosis of the perfectly dressed, but

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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he can reach a degree of shabbiness which is phenomenal. Not the poor and obscure, but the rich and usually the Great. Who has not seen the Great shabby and spotty to a degree? Still, it is one of the privileges of being great that one can afford to have samples of bygone repasts on one's waistcoat.

Before I had learnt by experience, I remember being introduced to the shabbiest, spottiest kind of old gentleman in Regent Street, who was shuffling along in company of an aged greeny-brown umbrella. He looked as if a shilling charitably bestowed would have been a godsend. I took a hasty inventory of his spots, his draggled necktie, his frayed wristbands, his down-trodden boots, and felt rather superior. It was, therefore, with a start that I heard a very famous name indeed, and found myself shaking the limp hand of a very eminent plutocrat. He saw that I was deeply impressed, but, distinguished though he was, he could not guess the real reason. I watched him shuffle down Regent Street, the threadbare seams of his coat boastfully outlining his bent back, and it struck me that he looked

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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modestly triumphant as he climbed the bus that passes the palace in which he lives. If ever a man was tyrannised over by a mean umbrella, a threadbare coat, and frayed trousers—the kind that hitch up behind—that was the man.

Once I met a man who was lured from the joys of Piccadilly just as he stood, in frock coat and top hat, to a rural retreat five miles from a railway station. I never saw anything so unbecoming to a landscape as that wretched hat and that superlatively rigid coat. It was in vain that we took him for walks and showed him the hills. He persisted in sitting disconsolately on a stile, and I shall never forget the abysmal gloom with which he watched the innocent gambols of a litter of young pigs. A man not without a sense of humour, and if his distinguished head had been covered by a straw hat he would have been the first to love the little pigs. As it was, he wandered tragically through the village street entirely out of drawing, and a terror and perplexity even to the chickens. He rather rudely refused the loan of a straw hat as being humanly impossible with a

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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frock coat, and he only cheered up the next day when he climbed into the train.

“Good-bye,” he said, in an impolite burst of rapture. “I fear my soul has not been in harmony with nature.”

“Don’t blame your soul,” I said cheerfully, as we shook hands, “your soul was all right, but you had on the wrong hat.”

Did you ever come across a martyr spending a “week-end” who has lost his dress-suit case, and who has to appear at a dinner-party in blue serge and brown boots? It takes a great and independent mind to rise superior to such a tragedy. Mostly it doesn’t. The blue serge martyr’s jokes all fall flat, he becomes self-conscious, confused, and apologetic, and he resents being the object of universal sympathy; and well he realises that he is a blight on the occasion, and that he quite spoils the colour-scheme of the table decorations.

Yes, when one comes to think about it, men, too, are the victims of clothes. To be sure their wardrobe is simpler, and they haven’t so many things to be uncertain about, but within their limited range it is instructive to observe how they, too, can

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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become the victims of Doubt. Question the taste of a man's necktie or his gloves, and see him writhe. Say you don't like the colour of his new suit, and you rouse the slumbering lion.

Have you ever, in the pursuit of your social studies, fastened your eyes on a man's boots? As an experiment, like putting a pin through a beetle, it is very interesting to the student. It causes a man unexplained suffering. Look at his feet in gentle meditation, and the greatest philosopher will find neither comfort nor support in his own philosophy. He becomes at once a monument of self-consciousness. Look into his eyes, and the chances are that he can stand that as long as you can, but if you wish to reduce him to an abject state of Doubt and Wretchedness stare at his boots. It is curious how shy men's feet are!

Such is the tyranny of clothes that though we may be obliged to starve, we dare not be out of fashion. We had a poor old charwoman to whom a good Samaritan gave a nice warm coat. It was in that year of grace when fashion decreed tight sleeves,

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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and the coat rejoiced in the roomy, overflowing kind of a previous season. Now what heroic soul dares to wear big, floppy sleeves when fashion decrees they must be tight? Our charwoman hadn't that kind of soul, and so she devoted a whole weary day, when she should have been scrubbing our basement, to reducing her sleeves to the size demanded by fashion.

"Cook said I couldn't wear 'em so," she explained to me later on. "Cook *is* rather dressy," she admitted, "and I know I ain't. But they said downstairs that I looked just as if I'd come out of the ark. Now that," she concluded defiantly, as she disappeared down to the basement, "that I really couldn't stand."

It was with clothes undoubtedly that tragedy first came into the world, but, of course, we owe them to Satan, and he has had his grip on them ever since. What dramas lurk behind an unpaid dress-maker's bill! What awful temptations—when one stops to think of it—lie in the paths of a woman! Men have other temptations, but they are not lured to destruction by diamonds and sables, un-

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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less, of course, indirectly. The French in the presence of a mystery say, in their subtle way, "*Cherchez la femme.*" But it is not only the woman one must go in search of, but also her wardrobe; her clothes in most cases will solve the mystery. Is not every woman in the clutches of a little private serpent who urges her to want the things she oughtn't to have? It is all that is left to her of the Garden of Eden except Adam, and, really, the less said about Adam the better.

Talk of your kings and queens, and socialists, and the gentlemen who long to blow us up with dynamite! Why, is there one of these whose merciless tyranny equals the last thing in Paris hats which persists in being bought, or that Paquin dress before whose cruel fascinations one succumbs? Then there's Adam, who declares he hasn't had new dress clothes since the days of his trousseau. But, goodness knows, one has but very little sympathy with Adam; he deserves the oldest and shabbiest kind of clothes. I am glad whenever they make him uncomfortable!

I rejoice when he wears brown boots

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## THE TYRANNY OF CLOTHES

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with his frock coat, and all the rest of those awful anachronisms, for Eve, the ill-treated, is strong within me! In his ungentlemanly way, did he not say it was my fault that day in the Garden of Eden?

The only solace I have in the tyranny under which I languish is that Adam languishes also. I rejoice to watch his struggles into a pair of tight new gloves. I love to see him when his necktie has slipped under his ear. It is a comfort to observe his anguish far away from a tailor and the one he loves best, when a nail plays havoc with his only pair, and he is reduced to a spectacle! I was so pleased the other day at a dinner-party, when Adam came bashfully down in an evening coat and shepherd's plaid trousers—the guardian angel who had packed his kit-bag having been a little absent-minded.

And yet, after all's said and done, Eve is to blame. There is no getting over that. But how she has suffered ever since! Consider the tragedy of every milliner's bill, and the awful moment when she has to confess to Adam! If she had only left that apple alone!

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## The London Bus

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**T**HE bus is the true republic. In it we are all free and equal. When we are in it we judge mankind only by weight, and not by clothes and social position. Should a king tread on one's toes it would hurt quite as much as if he were the meanest of his subjects. Should a princess, in the process of staggering in, plant her elbow on one's best hat, the result would be as disastrous as if the elbow belonged to the lowest middle-class.

Yes, the bus is the universal republic. I have seen a world-famous poet step out of one with such a look of inspiration on his splendid old face as if the Muses had been his fellow-passengers. Possibly they were, for the Muses are notoriously democratic. I have seen a duchess try to climb into one while it was still in motion, and the republican simplicity of its methods

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## THE LONDON BUS

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was vividly illustrated when the conductor, clutching her by one elbow, said severely as well as encouragingly, "Hurry yup, lidy."

What a glorious institution that first horse bus was! No century but ours could have evolved a conveyance at once so commodious and so democratic. Undoubtedly it has had a marked influence on progress, for it represents as nothing else does, liberty, fraternity, and equality. To this day, even in a motor bus, a king's penny gives him no greater privileges than a beggar's. Therefore a nation which makes use of buses cannot remain in the fetters of despotism. You cannot knock your elbows against your inferiors, your equals, and your superiors, without assimilating something of each. If kings commonly used buses, and clung to a beneficent rod, while a female subject, with a market-basket, accidentally hit the royal shins, after a while the king would acquire a certain respect for the basket, while its owner would find her wholesome dread of her sovereign tempered by a kindly familiarity. Had the bus entered the garden

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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of Eden along with Adam and Eve, what a difference it might have made to the world! Had it modestly rumbled through universal history, goodness knows what the beneficent result would have been! Oppressors and oppressed would have met on neutral ground, and neither could have resisted such levelling influence; for the contempt which familiarity breeds has in it, after all, something of good-nature.

There was that culmination of chaos, the French Revolution. Had a bus line started at the Louvre bound for the Bastille, through that hot-bed of terror, the Faubourg St. Antoine, who can tell the possible effects? Why, the exercise of the minor courtesies, such as making room for a stout and garlic-perfumed citizeness, or poking the conductor in the back, when he wouldn't look, for a lovely aristocrat, with the consequent soothing influence of a smile of gratitude, might have had results not to be overestimated. Politeness, after all, is only the oil which makes that complex machinery, society, turn smoothly. And a little politeness, judiciously applied, may even check a revolution.

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## THE LONDON BUS

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Alas, for the vanishing of the old horse bus! One cannot help clinging to it in spite of its shortcomings. I see with grief the time approach when its ponderous rolling will give way to all those hideous and death-dealing electrical and petrol inventions devised for our universal destruction.

It is interesting to observe how motion robs many a strange situation of embarrassment. There is dancing. Stop music and motion suddenly, leaving the dancers in their positions, and how very awkward, to say the least, it would be for them. It is the same in a bus. It is the motion that robs it of its embarrassment, for it *is* embarrassing! In what other situation in life are two long rows of people wedged opposite each other in a narrow space, with no earthly employment than to glare disapproval, or to ignore each other as if they had never been born? Or what is possibly even more humiliating, to look through each other as if the mere accident of clothes was no obstruction to the betrayal of a disgraceful internal construction?

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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The bus, even the motor bus, is a republic in which one is as good as another once he has got a seat. But in a horse bus the two passengers on either side of the door are perhaps a trifle more distinguished. They are usually two good Samaritans who come in for all the fresh air, but in return they are the self-constituted masters of ceremony, and they usually support the tottering forms of new-comers to the nearest vacancy.

Still, it is a curious fact that all passengers in a bus regard the advent of a new one with unspeakable antagonism. There is only one feeling like it, and that is when the owner of an expensive pew sees a shabby worshipper ushered in by a mistaken verger. It takes the passengers a full minute to reconcile themselves to a new-comer. They study her with a variety of critical expressions, and finally, after a rigid examination, they ignore her as if she were empty air. In the meantime she meekly struggles for breath because of the exertion of running after the bus and being dragged in, and then searches for her purse, which of course has a patent clasp that

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## THE LONDON BUS

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won't open. But having paid her fare and recovered her senses, it is interesting to observe how bold she becomes. She also joins the starers, and looks disapprovingly at the next fare who staggers in.

There is really nothing that makes one feel so triumphantly superior as to be comfortably seated in a crowded bus, and to observe the autocratic way in which the conductor ignores an agitated female with bundles, who waves a frantic umbrella at him to stop. If it is drizzling, one's epicurean enjoyment is enormously heightened. One feels all the cosier for the contrast. It is no use talking; it is these contrasts which give an added zest to life—that is, if one is not the party waving the frantic umbrella.

The noticeable characteristic of passengers in a bus is certainly a total want of expression. It is, indeed, the true end and aim of the highest civilisation to eliminate all expression. How thoroughly it succeeds every bus proves. Who ever sees the tragedy in that vacant face under the respectable top-hat, or the farce under the "toque"? Top-hat and toque are

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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outwardly totally unmoved by what goes on underneath them. Indeed, there is nothing which so irritates a bus as even a faint display of emotion. Passengers resent a smile addressed to no one in particular. Smile and look too cheerful and you are at once set down in their estimation as a lunatic, an ass, or possibly a foreigner. Yes, you are probably a foreigner, and that explains why you show your feelings. Now a foreigner's emotions are something no Englishman can understand, and he studies them with perplexity and disapproval. One has to discount a foreigner's emotions !

The other day I was in a horse bus, and opposite me sat a man I knew in company of a foreigner, a foreigner produced in Italy, and made of the best steel springs. He quivered, he bounced, he thumped his forehead, he beat his breast, he beat the other man's breast, and he played a tattoo on each one of his coat buttons, and then he menaced him with a dramatic forefinger. Finally he brandished his arms, and then folded them like Napoleon at St. Helena, and stared gloomily at the man who, we all felt, and the bus stared as if hypnotised,

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## THE LONDON BUS

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must have been guilty of something dreadful. Just then we reached Leicester Square, and the son of Italy rose to his feet.

“It is zere where ze hake is,” he said with tragic accents, and beat his breast with one hand, while he hung on to the rod with the other. “It is the visky ving.” Then he climbed heavily down. Whereupon we stared suspiciously at the man left behind as one who had been found out.

He came across and sat down beside me, and I was at once conscious of being included in the general disfavour. I wished he hadn't. But I must say he seemed quite unconscious of crime.

“That's a dear old Italian friend of mine,” he explained cheerfully. “He doesn't know much English. You see, he has only lived in London thirty years.”

“What did he mean by ‘hake’ and ‘visky ving’?” I asked, unconvinced.

“O, he was only trying to explain that he had a pain in his chest due to the east wind.”

It is so interesting to study the varieties of people one sees in the old horse bus. The two passengers at the door are always

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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either good Samaritans or misanthropes. If they are misanthropes, they rejoice when you stumble in, and they draw themselves up indignantly when you tread on their toes, as if you didn't hate to tread on their toes, for it makes you lose your balance. Of course, there are always oblivious ladies who sit in the middle of the seat, and who resent being mildly requested to "move up." When they do, it is with indignant reluctance, and they retaliate by poking you in the ribs with the hook of their umbrella. Then there are ample ladies who overflow their allotted space, and who crush you with stately indifference. Then there are absent-minded persons in the charge of umbrellas—spiteful umbrellas that slip down and trip up the unwary, who, if they are masculine, say things, and if they are feminine, look things. Who has not met the young person there who doesn't know where she is going, but has it written on a piece of paper which she can't find?

Then there is the suspicious female who studies the list of fares with the avowed intention of catching the conductor cheating. One is accustomed to the woman who

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## THE LONDON BUS

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has received too little change, and who, just when the bus thinks it looks pretty bad for the conductor, finds a stray shilling on her lap, whereupon she looks more grim than ever. Of course there is always a choleric old gentleman who is hauled in panting, and threatens to report the conductor for inattention. That there are always innumerable people who are placidly proceeding in the opposite direction from their destination goes without saying.

In bad weather there is always an American inside with a hand-bag and an inquiring mind, whose destination we are at once told is either the British Museum or Westminster Abbey. She asks many questions, but to her the bus heart opens in overflowing sympathy. *She* is not a foreigner; no, indeed. Information is showered on her. Fatherly old gentlemen emerge from protecting newspapers and volunteer advice. Even the conductor, affected by this epidemic of benevolence, allows his bus to come to a full stop as he helps her out, and points out the right direction. Ah, yes, blood *is* thicker than water!

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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There is the benevolent party who leaves his morning paper as a legacy to the conductor ; and one bitter winter day, I saw one dear soul give him his warm gloves, for the man's thin, worn hands were purple with the cold.

Of course there is always the fond mother, usually without front teeth, who holds her Johnny on her lap as on a throne. Johnny wears on his head a white plush muffin ; a red shawl wound about his short person betrays symptoms of a pinafore. His nether man rejoices in red woollen socks and "ankle-ties." In one chubby hand he holds the remains of a bun, which, in the process of consumption, has left a layer of crumbs and sugar over his engaging features. He occasionally offers this refreshment to his doting mother, and the family group, including a paper bag, are very crumby and sugary indeed. He is a friendly little soul with but a hazy notion as to the masculine author of his being, for he greets rapturously a very smart young man who is making his way in, a young man with a monocle and other hall-marks of extreme fashion, as "da-da," to the

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## THE LONDON BUS

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young man's unspeakable anguish and the stony amusement of the other passengers.

We have all come across the strenuous woman who strides in and clamours for fresh air. She boarded a bus in which I was the other day—a bitter cold day. Without apology she flung open a window, and her thin Roman nose gulped in with rapture great icy whiffs of a real hurricane ; then she sat down and said something very impolite about microbes to a companion. She had a loud, assertive voice, and she talked with a great display of white teeth like tombstones. Whereupon the whole bus felt humiliated at having been so oblivious to microbes. Suddenly out of a corner there rose a little old lady like a mouse, and with a determination that was like cast-iron, but pleasantly covered by velvet, she closed the offending window with a soft thud. For a second the lady with the Roman nose stared at the mouse, and then she turned away with a toss of her head, but she did not open the window again. A faint smile of triumph flitted across the bus. What right has any one in a republic to demand fresh air at the

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point of the bayonet ? It is really the most humiliating insult you can offer to any one. It puts you at once on a superior social footing, for the lower you are in the social scale the less you care what you breathe, and you don't mind those wretched microbes a bit who do such unpleasant things to you as soon as they get into your interior.

We were never taught that gallantry and bad air always went together, but apparently they did. At any rate, there was much more of both in the past. One can, indeed, judge of the decreasing gallantry of the world by the enthusiastic way in which men keep their seats in buses and other public conveyances and hide behind newspapers when a forlorn female looks wistfully in, and is either left forsaken on the pavement or she ascends aloft with a miscellaneous display of boots. Goodness sakes, are those Englishmen, who cannot be prodded out of their seats, really the degenerate descendants of King Arthur and all his gallant knights, who simply ached to fight dragons and things in honour of their lady-loves ?

O, King Arthur, what would you have

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## THE LONDON BUS

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said, had your panoplied ghost hovered on the outskirts of a Shepherd's Bush bus, near Oxford Circus, the other day in a drizzle, and had you seen a lovely lady with a square bandbox and a red nose look wistfully into the crowded interior, while the conductor loomed up behind her ?

“ Will any gent ki-indly give up his seat to this lidy ? ” he urged. Whereupon the descendants of that blameless knight, who lived but to succour the helpless, declined as one man. The world may be growing better, but it is really out of fashion now to come to the rescue of distressed damsels ; we invariably leave distressed damsels to the care of the police. The reason is, possibly, because dragons have grown so scarce.

One can judge of the increasing luxury of the world by the calm way in which it accepts the bus as a necessity and not a luxury, as it once was. There was a time when a bus ride was a real treat, to be anticipated days in advance. Fond lovers sought its shelter to flee into the suburbs, where they could hold hands unreprieved, and suck peppermint drops, while they

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gazed into each other's eyes. Those were the days when paterfamilias promised his offspring a possible ride in its agitated interior as a reward of good conduct. Fathers and mothers often eloped by means of its kindly aid from those familiar cares, represented by Sammy's rasped knees, or the shrieks of the twins.

We must, indeed, be nearing our fall if a bus drive is accepted by the world at large without any especial rejoicing. The poorest wretch, if he can scrape together a penny, may drive behind his chariot and pair or his motor. But does his face light up at this amazing privilege? Not a bit of it. He simply joins the republic of the expressionless.

Fortunate is the country whose demands on the luxuries of life are the simplest. The Anglo-Saxon has no talent for cheap pleasure. And to be easily and cheaply amused is only second, as a factor in the welfare of a nation, to being well and cheaply educated. Neither the English nor the Americans realise the value of innocent and inexpensive pleasures as a safeguard for the people. Give people

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wholesome amusements cheap, and it will protect them even against intemperance.

The patron of the interior of the bus is more familiar with the conductor than the driver. No human being is required to exercise more philosophy than the bus conductor. Justice is really not done to him. All day long he stands patiently on his little footboard in the pouring rain and the blazing sun, and answers those impossible questions it is the destiny of passengers to ask. It is probably in self-defence that he knows nothing beyond the line of his route. Possibly he has travelled from the "Roy'l Oak" to the Bank year in and year out, but ask him the location of a street within a stone's throw of his daily toil and the chances are that he has never heard of it.

One can, of course, imagine the wear and tear on his brain if by any inconceivable chance he knew too much. Now he is quite safe, for all questions recoil harmlessly against his profound ignorance. But then, that is his safeguard. Still, one can honestly admire his serenity and his equilibrium. The only criticism I venture

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to make is that he should not so persistently turn his back on his worried interior, who vainly try to catch his impersonal eye when they want to get out. How his back must ache from being poked by feminine umbrellas in moments of despair! Also, I do wish he wouldn't haul in the suffering public with such an iron grasp before the bus slows up, especially when the public is stout and not agile. Apart from these trifles, he is a kindly and civil philosopher. England is the real home of the polite. In no other country is one so deluged with "thanks." The conductor offers a civil "thank you" with every punched ticket. Now, how often does he say "thank you" in the course of the day? One recoils at this stupendous problem! The provocation to beat somebody when he gets home after so much enforced politeness must be very great. In this instance it really seems to me pardonable.

No, the conductor is not on so friendly terms with the public as the driver. But no wonder; he knows his public better. His only real relaxation is an interchange

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of chaff with that genial student of life, the driver of the next bus ; and, occasionally, he waves an easy hand to some passing brother of the punch. And if there is a touch of misanthropy about him, who can wonder ? Who would not be misanthropic when a periodical inspector boards the bus, studies the punched tickets, and so proclaims him as unworthy of the confidence of the public. Even a conductor has his pride.

Still, it is melancholy to think that, with all its shortcomings, the days of the horse bus are numbered. It will indeed be the end of a genial era. What motorman, with his haggard motor face, will ever take the place of that great artist in horses, who, tucked aloft on his little throne, with a flower in his buttonhole, his whip waving, his hat on one side, his improving conversation, his face red from exhilaration and air (also, possibly, beer), threads his dangerous way through the traffic, and yet with an alert eye on the sideshows of life ? There is no more admirable being in the world than the bus driver ! The easy way with which he skirts destruction without being

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destroyed is the greatest thing of its kind. Compared to him the charioteers of old Rome were not in it. And yet for the study of human nature seek the interior of a bus. The exterior is without character. Backs are uninspiring, and on top of the bus one sees nothing but the back of one's fellow-man. Only the adventurous souls on the two front benches have a chance. They can talk to the driver, and the driver, great man though he is, is easily moved by inquiring beauty. So when beauty inquires, especially if from America, he unbends and points out historic sights with his whip, and vouchsafes titbits of information, sometimes authentic and sometimes not.

Let the horse bus be spared in the march of progress ; we can do so well, instead, without many other modern improvements. Leave us our horse buses, and take away, rather, the motor and all its hideous variations : the motor bike and vans, the traction engines, the steam rollers, and all the other monstrosities propelled by steam, petrol, and electricity, that imperil our roads and shatter our defenceless nervous systems. Take away all

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those infernal inventions which a County Council without courage or common sense, permits to terrorise our streets. It is really the fault of our incompetent city governments if we are fast becoming a nation of lunatics and dyspeptics, with a tendency to put an end to ourselves on very slight provocation.

It is indeed the melancholy truth that we of the twentieth century are being persecuted to death by progress.

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## The Tragedy of the "Ex"

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**I**T was at an Academy private view that it was brought forcibly to my notice. A lady and gentleman were about to mount the stairs when the man detached himself and went back to an elderly man who stood apart from the crowd, and greeted him with genial warmth. He shook the elderly man's hand with an exaggerated effusiveness by which he tried hard to cover the embarrassment he felt on having his kindly greeting met with an icy stare. The elderly man having paralysed the too cordial one, the too cordial one stammered and retreated to his companion still waiting for him on the stairs. She received him with chaffing contempt.

"At any rate, I wouldn't be snubbed by an 'ex,'" was her odd greeting.

"Poor old boy, I am sorry for him," the snubbed one said good-naturedly, "he is taking it hard. I don't mind him."

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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Whereupon they climbed up the red stairs, and forgot the snub, because, after all's said and done, in society the snub of an "ex" doesn't hurt.

I looked meditatively at the elderly man, who still stood gloomily waiting, and solved at once the riddle of the "ex." For I recognised in him a man who had been great, wielding a world-wide influence, the kind of influence that made Cabinet Ministers willing to wait on his front doorsteps if he happened to be out, while duchesses positively enjoyed his being rude to them, and unassorted celebrities were to him as God had made them—that is, natural. Then, suddenly, something happened. The lever by which he moved the world was taken from his grasp—a younger man wanted it. So one tragic day he found himself reduced to the ranks of the "ex." The world is full of the tragedy of the "ex," melancholy, resentful human beings, on whom the door of Paradise has closed with a bang.

Once, in her old and lonely age, I met a very great lady who in her brilliant and happy past had had the whole world at her feet. It was said of her, as the crown and

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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summit of her glory, that she had succeeded in making one of the greatest men of his day very unhappy for a whole year. Of course it takes a woman to appreciate fully the satisfactory nature of this achievement. When I saw her she was very old and ill, and helpless, and quite alone in the world, though in a palace. I, thinking, womanlike, of the famous man she had made unhappy fifty years before, said, not finding anything comforting to say of her present :

“How happy you must be to think of your beautiful past !”

Whereupon she looked at me with her weary, faded eyes, and replied with a kind of hopeless impatience :

“Have you ever found any one who is really grateful for a happy past that’s gone for ever ?”

I then realised, as I have again and again, the justice of fate which punishes those who have had too much of good fortune in their life with a profound and lasting regret.

The “ex” are always with us. M.P.’s and Cabinet Ministers and even greater ones yet swell the ranks of the unemployed.

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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It must be a curious Arabian Night kind of feeling, given to few, to be one day a ruler of millions, hedged about by the pomp of kings, and the next day, possibly, to be climbing a London penny bus, unmolested, and unnoticed except by the conductor who says benevolently, "'Old tight, sir." Of such are the tragedies of democracy. But, indeed, life is so crowded with great dramas that the world has no time to waste much thought on any one of them. Probably your private tragedy looms very large to you, but do not make the foolish mistake to imagine that it looms very large to any one else. Your neighbour's pin-prick engrosses him much more than your tragedy next door.

The disadvantage of climbing high is that you can fall so much farther; and that hurts. Happy are those who stand on the safe level of the unaspiring, for that, though they don't usually know it, constitutes their splendid solace. It is a great and supreme art to climb down from a height so gently and unobtrusively that nobody notices you, so wherever you may ultimately find yourself, the world accepts

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you as a matter of course, and is not amused. It takes great heroism to accept the inevitable with grace and dignity, and not to make the world smile.

The tragedy of the "ex" is the universal human tragedy, but, somehow, one does not bring it home to oneself. Who ever thinks that his day is over? No one. One's talent, success, aspirations are in one's own estimation immortal. If one had the ghost of a doubt, how differently one would act! There is a climax to every man's career be he ever so great, and no man can escape the sympathy or neglect of the world. It is a question which hurts most. The only human attribute, it would seem, that outlives the final tragedy of time, is character. A great statesman undoubtedly outlives his usefulness; a great financier will find the time come when younger brains will outwit his, weary and worn with the eternal and futile struggle for wealth and recognition. A great painter will reach a time when his eyes and his faithful hands become tired; and the poet, too, will find his imagination unresponsive to spurring. Even the greatest scientists have to make way for

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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newer discoverers. What we call knowledge is but a stepping-stone to the eternal truths. And in due time, the stepping-stones having served their turn, they lose all their value, except an historical one. But the saint remains a saint long after his eyes close in death, and his memory and influence live on, and time is powerless to hurt them. The goodness, the uprightness, the splendid example of men and women, those only are immortal, as Heaven—not the world—understands immortality.

I remember being shown through the great library at Christ Church, Oxford, by a distinguished professor of history. He pointed out some old tomes piled in a corner, sumptuous in medieval binding.

"They're to be turned out," he said regretfully; "we need the room. They have served their day, and are valuable only as curiosities. Their wisdom, in the light of modern research, has become folly."

It was profoundly startling to hear that even wisdom may become antiquated; and that its value is for ever changing, for ever being modified in the light of a profounder knowledge.

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There is nothing so impatient and uncharitable as youth, and it is youth that forgets the soonest. So no wonder that in a young country men and women get shelved soonest, and join the ranks of the "ex." The world is going at a fearfully rapid pace, and we get to the end of our careers in a deplorably short time, and nowhere in so short a time as in America. Memory in America is tragically short, in the same proportion as its sense of reverence is tragically deficient. It is a curious study, this America, with its tremendous reverence for all things that are very ancient, in contrast to its lack of reverence for a human being who is merely old.

By way of contrast there is no quality that strikes the social student more than the sturdy loyalty characteristic of the English. The Englishman is nothing if not loyal. Possibly it is a part of his intense conservatism; but, at any rate, it is there. There is nothing volatile about him, and so he misses the charm of the lighter temperament, but also its defects. Know him, and, if he likes you, you know him once for all. He does not change, and—

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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here is the defect of his nature—often enough he refuses to acknowledge that the world changes, nor does he always realise its gigantic progress. He who is the mightiest founder of empires is in this twentieth century in a fair way to be left behind by his own children, in whom he sowed the seeds of progress, enlightenment, and ambition. Who has not seen a big, splendid man pathetically true to the scraggy, elderly love of his youth, admiring her grey curls, and those side-laced boots which encase her elderly and solid ankles? Somehow this picture is so typically English.

Constancy is sometimes not without a touch of sentimentality, and there are no people quite so sentimental as the English. Indeed, experience teaches one that the keener and more hard-headed a man is, the more Nature attempts to recover her balance by making him profoundly sentimental. What other nation but the English could produce the rapturous audiences of our ballad concerts, where, year in and year out, they listen to the feeblest of verses

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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married to the feeblest of music, and sung by the old, old favourites? What other people but the English remain so true to what has once given them joy? To the sturdy, honest, Englishman, with no knowledge but a great deal of emotion, for which he has no adequate outlet, the art of his youth he loyally loves to the day of his death—the art which suffused his cold blue eyes with a haze of tears, and made his constant heart beat a little faster beneath his immaculate shirt-front. He does not understand the dramatic emotions of the volatile Frenchman or Italian; in fact, he not only abhors them, but he is ashamed of them. Yet his inward sobs are very real, if unheard, when an aged songstress, connected also with the beautiful days of his youth, carols forth “Put him in his little bed.”

In his constancy he is quite devoid of humour; in fact, the Englishman dreads humour. He, who by some curious freak of Nature, has, as a nation, given the world its greatest humorists, is as an individual afraid of it. And, indeed, he is more afraid of laughter than he is of tears. In fact, if

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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he had more humour, it would have had a wholesome effect on British art, and by and by he would cease to love the feeble.

The Victorian age, besides its phase of greatness, had a phase of mediocrity, which, had it not been so funny, would have been appalling. It was undoubtedly the bread-and-butter era of the Arts, and the immortal Nine for many a long year did outrage to their feelings by wearing Balmoral skirts, hoops, side-elastic boots, "spit-curls," a "water-fall," and exhibited virtues which, it is to be feared, were not always characteristic of them. While their near relatives, the three Graces, in deference to the young person with a cheek too prone to blush, arrayed their Greek legs in British pantalets. The old lessons of the Victorian age are still not quite forgotten—so loyal are the English!—and if the Muses and the Graces are not entirely draped in Victorian garments, they are, as it were, still adorned with the British pantalets, and so the middle-class English love to see them.

Heine—studying the Englishman through a medium of fog and antagonism—declares

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him to be the most arrant of hypocrites ; in which he is quite wrong. The middle-class Englishman—and, be it said with gratitude, he represents the real nation—is only sentimental, intensely respectable, and also very prudish. And he it is who still forms public opinion. The highest classes may assimilate the worst vices of other nations, and contribute their own, but these evils do not affect the class that is respectable as well as sentimental, and one can be both and yet not be a hypocrite. Heine, that arch-wit, conscious of the English national lack of humour, in a cynical moment branded a whole nation with an undeserved epithet, forgetting that the wrong done by a great poet is immortal. The land of the “shocked” and the “shocking” could not be sympathetic to a poet whose lexicon of youth contained neither word. He gave them credit for neither sincerity nor feeling, these English who, if they cannot quite resist the electric spirit of the age whose motto is “forget,” can still be depended on more than other people to be faithful to old favourites, even when

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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these have ceased to deserve it. All the same, the tragedy of the "ex" is the universal tragedy; at best it is only delayed.

But the perfection and haste of forgetting is undoubtedly American. I remember a very characteristic incident. Some years ago an author emerged out of obscurity, and suddenly shone in America as a star of the first magnitude. Society in Boston went quite mad over her, with the result that the young lion developed a bad case of swelled head. One day I met an old friend in the street, one of the band of modern hero-worshippers who lay flowers and "candy" on the shrine of the latest lion. I observed that she bore a card-case and was distinctly subdued.

"Where have you been?" I asked politely.

"I've been to call on——" and she mentioned the young lion's name, "and O!" she cried in a sudden outburst of indignation, "how she did snub me! I'd be ashamed to treat a worm so!"

"Serves you right for calling on a lion," was my comment.

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It was about a year after that I again met her, and again she was armed with a card-case.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“To leave a card on Miss——” and she again named the same lion. “I’m sure nobody else will, for this year everybody’s running after——” and she mentioned the very latest thing in lions, “and so I thought she’d be real lonely, and glad to have my card.” Whereupon she proceeded on her benevolent errand.

I recognised the familiar national trait with a sense of melancholy amusement. The rapturous enthusiasm with which Americans take up anything new, be it a man or woman, a religion or a patent medicine, an art or a liver-pill, or anything else that appeals to their many-faceted natures, must seek for balance by an equally rapid forgetting. Not that it is, of course, only American, but it is essentially American. The greatest man in America, whose name fills all the papers and is on every tongue, who looms so large that he blots out the most distinguished men about him, will yet find his Nemesis

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in that American memory which does not even wait—far from it!—for a tombstone to cover his last resting-place. For no matter how great a man is, there is always some one who thinks, or whose friends think, that he is as great, if not possibly greater, and so there is always some one waiting with unconcealed impatience for his empty shoes while he still has them on. Whereupon, the shoes being finally empty, the famous man who once wore them becomes an "ex," and such future career as is left to him is suffocated by his distinguished past as by a mountainous feather-bed.

It is enough to study the careers of the ex-Presidents of the United States to realise the phenomenal brevity of the American memory—that is, during life. Sometimes, after they are dead, they have a renaissance of appreciation. As for Vice-Presidents, they are forgotten while still in office. Occasionally one emerges from the singular obscurity of his exalted position by disaster to his chief; but unless such a chance arises many an able but bothersome man, who cannot be overlooked by party politics,

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has been nicely buried in that distinguished office which is only next in unimportance to the silent tomb.

It was within three months of the assassination of President McKinley that an Englishman of my acquaintance called upon him. In the course of the conversation he expressed to Mr. McKinley the universal regret felt here at the loss to Great Britain by the departure of that distinguished statesman, Mr. John Hay, who had resigned his position as Ambassador to England to become Secretary of State. The Englishman seemed to think that not only England but Mr. Hay was the loser.

“To be Ambassador to England is, of course the greatest office in your gift,” he said, conscious that there is only one England.

“No,” the President replied, “it is a much greater position to be Secretary of State. He comes next in importance to the President.” Here he paused and then added casually, as an afterthought which had nearly escaped him, “I mean, of course, with the exception of the Vice-President.”

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## THE TRAGEDY OF THE "EX"

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Three months after, the Vice-President, who in the enumeration had been so nearly overlooked, took up the reins of government. It was, of course, Mr. Roosevelt.

It does seem as if the United States could make more worthy use of its distinguished "ex." By the time they have become profoundly versed in the science of statecraft they are relegated to oblivion, instead of having their tried wisdom still employed in the councils of the nation. There comes a time in the lives of great statesmen when circumstances deprive them of the ordinary outlets of ambition, and it would seem as if then their impartial services would be of vast value to the nation. But so far the highest in the land cannot escape the universal tragedy. However, there is no profession, no art, no position in life which can escape that doom.

In contradiction to that mistaken pronouncement of the Declaration of Independence that we are all born free and equal, one can only be absolutely sure that we die free and equal. When we are born we are at once bound by unbreakable

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chains. We are all slaves of our environment, slaves of inherited disease, slaves of inherited unintelligence, slaves of inherited good or evil tendencies, and such we remain until we die, and only then are we free and equal—free from the chains that bound us, and which made us the helpless playthings of destiny, and equal in our helplessness one to the other.

The longer one lives and observes how each life, however great or however modest, has its climax of usefulness, the more one is struck by the folly of the human attitude towards humanity. There is no human being, however great, who is not at the mercy of some other man; or supposing he is not—which is, however, inconceivable—then he is at the mercy of some inherited disease. Or supposing that he has no disease which may make him curse his forbears, he is at any rate at the mercy of natural laws, and he must inevitably die. For laws are even greater than the God who made them. A tap on the head, or a fatal disease, will make even an Emperor a pitiable thing with whom no healthy beggar would exchange destinies. It is

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melancholy to think how faint is the boundary line between ourselves and destruction. To contemplate the loftiness with which the human being promenades on the brink of the precipice into which, sooner or later, he is destined to tumble!

How little it takes to swell the average human being's head! How proud he is of his little intellect, his big bank account, his social position, or any other thing by which he can proclaim his superiority (God save the mark!) to his fellow worm! If the Supreme Power, who is responsible for human laughter as well as human tears, has a sense of humour, how grimly he must be amused at the airs and the eternal fierce conflicts of the little creatures who grub in this familiar ant-hill! Nor is it one of the least of the tragedies of our existence that we waste our few measured hours on trivialities. It is only at the end of life, when the little remaining sand in the hour-glass runs with appalling swiftness, that we realise the preciousness of the hours that will never return. To meditate on the chances that we once had, but which we have lost, is the intimate tragedy of the

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“ex.” Every dog has his day, but, alas ! it is only a day.

This electric age is the age of youth. Every man is being understudied by some aspiring youngster who, in his own imagination, has shelved his chief, while that unconscious man still thinks that the world cannot possibly do without him. Now there is no man so great but the world can do perfectly well without him. It is one of the profoundly wise provisions of Nature that no man is missed because he is merely important. Youth is constantly at the heels of age, and clamours insistently for recognition, and it is only the narrow and the foolish who refuse it.

I was struck by the remark of a clever and thoughtful man, to whose attention the somewhat preposterous claims of a group of talented but untried youngsters had been brought. Instead of agreeing with the rather scornful reference to their unreasonable demands, considering their youth and inexperience, he said: “You forget. These boys are destined to be the great men of the future.” How many of us think that? If youth is often

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uncharitable to age, age is often enough blind to the claims of youth. It is rather difficult to realise that the youth whose ears one has cuffed in early days has claims to one's profound admiration. No man ever was a hero to his valet, and age knows youth too well to take it seriously.

To what mother does her child ever grow old, no matter how famous the child? It is so hard to lay aside the habit of authority, even when the child has grey hair, and is starting on the downward path. Perhaps of all the tragedies none is more painful than the irrevocable one, when the parent realises that the child has ceased to be dependent on him for advice, if not for sympathy. It does seem as if the wise recognition that one's day of usefulness has a limit, and that it is only fair to give another man a chance, should influence our attitude to other human beings. It ought to make for a friendly humility, for a wider charity, for a profounder sense of human brotherhood.

When a king dies, he dies to all intents and purposes in no other way than the poorest outcast in his kingdom; he has

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entered the republic of death, and he is an ex-king. The richest man in the world cannot, at the price of all his wealth, buy one single heart-beat more from destiny. The wisdom of the greatest intellect cannot obtain for its possessor the respite of another instant of time. Would it not seem natural that this universal helplessness, which spares no one, ought to be a bond to make us profoundly tolerant one to the other, profoundly charitable? Instead, one is amazed at the mean and trivial standards by which human beings judge each other, as well as at the tragic importance they attach to what is of colossal unimportance. Do we not judge our fellow-creatures by their clothes, their right or their wrong religion, their cleverness, their success, their wealth and their social position? Society, on the brink of the universal precipice, runs after the bad man with influence, after the rich man whose riches are tainted, after the man of rank with neither intellect nor character.

The truth is the world has ceased to have any convictions, and martyrdom is dreadfully out of fashion. We have so much to

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think of that we don't think at all. The martyrs believed in some one thing profoundly; we have neither time nor conviction enough to think of anything profoundly, for the world clamours for our attention in a hundred thousand different ways every moment of time. We believe only in the material aspects of life and faith; our creed is to have only faith in what we can see and prove. So we have great scientists, but no martyrs. The martyrs were the scientists of the ideal, but ideality, like poets and martyrs, is of a bygone age.

No, not even women are able to escape the tragedy of the "ex." Who has not watched a beautiful woman grow old? That tragedy at least is spared a plain woman. Put a pair of spectacles on your plain nose and who cares? But when the loveliest eyes in the world hide behind glasses—that is indeed a woman's tragedy.

To fall from great beauty, great wealth, great power, great position—to realise, if you only can, that, in short, you have come to the end—is the supreme tragedy of life, and proves the benevolence of destiny

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towards those who are nothing in particular, and who therefore escape the doom of falling so far.

Perhaps the acutest suffering for a prominent "ex" is that he has to suffer in public, and we all have that in common with the noble savage, that when we suffer we prefer to retire from view. To suffer in the curious eyes of the world is to suffer doubly. It is hard and undignified, if not impossible, to push one's way to the front again, to the place one once occupied, through a mob of clamouring youngsters, who bar one's path. The consolation for all must be that it is everybody's destiny sooner or later. What use to rebel? Look, rather, with profound and amused philosophy at Arrogance that elbows its way through the world as if there were no bad fairy with a wand waiting for it at the end to turn it into an "ex."

Would it not be well in the day of triumph to think of the inevitable future? To be not only great, but civil? To be famous and yet not devoured by conceit? To appreciate a great position at its full worth and yet not to be a snob? Not to

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judge success by the standard of mere wealth ?

One offers these modest suggestions to the rich and great and famous, because who of us has not suffered from the rich, the great, and the famous ? After all, even these are all destined to be back numbers sooner or later. Why not consider the probability of being a back number in the heyday of life, when your natural instinct is, of course, to snub your fellow-men ? Even the greatest of you would be wise to be somewhat modest, for the inexorable motto of this world is " The King is dead ! Long live the King ! "

And who ever bothers about a dead king !

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## The New Fashion in Heroes

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**T**HERE is a fashion in heroes as in everything else, for without doubt the hero of one age may be considered a lunatic in another. For example, it would require more courage for a knight armed cap-à-pie and mounted on a fiery steed, to charge down the congested traffic of Piccadilly Circus in search of a possible dragon, than to have faced half a dozen real dragons, ramping and snorting fire, in those days when dragons were in fashion. But the fashion in dragons has gone out, and the fashion in heroes is changing, and we have developed a sense of humour against which the old heroes would have been much more powerless than against dragons. In fact, the new fashion in heroes is for those who save rather than those who kill. However, there still remains in us, possibly as inheritance from some brute of an ancestor,

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## THE NEW FASHION IN HEROES

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an abnormal respect for the man who kills, and who has, indeed, until recently, inspired the poets and the popular imagination.

In those prehistoric days when there were no circulating libraries, and poets, instead of being nicely bound and borrowed, even if they were not bought, stood at street corners and recited their latest productions, people were never tired of listening to tales of warriors who went out to battle. And, in spite of the new fashion in heroism, it cannot be denied that the young of our race do love to hear of a real, good fight. When the dear old heroes went out on adventures, the greater the slaughter the greater their glory. It may, in parenthesis, be added that these gallant warriors formed the first Trust on record, for they held a giant monopoly of killing, to which only the well-born were eligible. The common man in those days got more kicks than glory, which has on the whole been his portion until very recent times.

But not only have the military heroes of all ages had the cream of the glory, but in the tradition of every nation, as if that

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were not enough, there has been prepared for them when they were so unlucky as to be killed, a Valhalla where they could eternally repose after their glorious deeds. Valhalla, also, was a kind of gigantic Trust to which only pedigree heroes were eligible. It might be a queer pedigree: father a god, mother a mere mortal—there are several known instances of such irregular domestic arrangements—but, at any rate, the hero had to be Somebody.

The Valkyries have never been known to make the mistake, as they hovered over the field of battle on their flying steeds, of bearing aloft to Wotan their father, any other kind of hero no matter how heroic, for only the socially elect were eligible who had fallen either gloriously killing or been gloriously killed.

In a way the fashion in glory is dying hard, for the business of what might be called legally killing has ever been considered very noble and exclusive—at least for the men on top, while there has always been an inconsistent prejudice against a gentleman lurking on a street corner on purpose to put a weapon through any one

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who has aroused his antipathy. On the other hand, be miles apart and it is quite right and proper, if one is so commanded, to pepper away with little bullets at some one unknown, unseen, and towards whom one has no resentment whatsoever. In the first instance the chances are if the lurking gentleman is caught that he will be hung, and in the other that the rank and file, having peppered and been peppered, will be given a tuppenny medal ; which is all very perplexing !

It must be confessed that our rewards to the rank and file have never been very lavish, and are not even now, for it is still the well-born who get the cream and the glory. Even tradition does not bother much about the rank and file, although in all ages they have done the hard work and been killed, and been forgotten after the first effervescence of gratitude was over. And they have always had to be satisfied with a sample man reaping the reward of their heroism. When one sees the tragic relics of war stumping along on one leg or joining the ranks of the unemployed with one arm, or sitting by the roadside with

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both eyes shot away, and hardly any one pausing to notice, one cannot but be struck by the magnificent temporary nature of gratitude. On one side maimed survivors, and on the other the sample man with reverberating titles, decorations, glory, money, and a mistaken sense of his own importance fostered by a benevolent press. Somehow one can't help wishing if Valhalla still exists and is so exclusive, that there might be a middle-class Valhalla for middle-class heroes.

War has always been a business, sublime, possibly, but still a business, and warriors have always been paid, and badly paid, to be heroic, but, one cannot help asking, Why should the man on top get all the reward? The obvious reply is: What would an army be without a great general? To which one longs to retort with equal reason: What would the greatest general on earth do without an army? But this is a digression. Only one longs to offer up a plea for a little more equality in the rewards of our heroes of war.

However, ours is a heroic age, although on quite new lines, so if Wotan looks down

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at it from his Valhalla hung with cobwebs, he will discover to his surprise and disgust that we now acclaim a new kind of hero, the kind of whom he never heard—the hero of peace. In Wotan's day there were no newspapers, there were only poets, and the poets have rarely been inspired to sing of the heroism of the proletariat; possibly because it is more difficult to focus a mass than an individual. So they sang of the valour of their kings and nobles whose deeds, it is more than probable, poets being human, did not lose any of their glory in the telling. Indeed even we, it must be confessed, with our broader outlook on heroism, have not yet got over glorifying the wrong man.

Because of the surface prose of our age it has, also, quite gone out of fashion to crown our heroes with laurels; instead we interview them and fill the newspapers with their horrid woodcuts. Even our poets have ceased to confer immortality—for our age, it must be sorrowfully confessed, declines to listen to the poets. So only the newspapers are left to bestow immortality. But every morning a worthy

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citizen able to dispose of a ha'penny, can feel his breast swell within him as he gulps down his coffee and leans his ha'penny-worth of glory against the coffee-pot, when he reads of the heroism of his fellow-man. Which is a great improvement on the times when to hear of the last thing in glory a man had to linger at a draughty street corner to listen to a ballad monger. The same kind of tears, probably, dim his eyes as the eloquent reporter reports, as those which in other days filled the eyes of his hard-headed Saxon ancestor in hides, as he listened to a wandering harper twanging his instrument beside the rude hearth. For although fashions change the human soul remains much the same.

The most enviable attribute of divinity must be not to punish the Wicked, but to reward the Good, although, to our finite understandings, it seems as if the reward of the Good does sometimes get unaccountably delayed, and the Wicked do as unaccountably flourish. It may, however, be that it is only in fairy tales that the Good always get rewarded, and the Good are always heroic, while the Heroic are al-

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ways good ; which makes it easier for the kindly power that has the distributing of rewards.

Indeed, one has often wondered why, during all these centuries of time, our short-sighted human efforts should always have been devoted to establishing tribunals for the punishment of the Wicked rather than to reward the Good. When therefore, not long ago, a hero fund was established to reward those who had done brave deeds unconnected with war, one felt that this was a first step in the right direction.

There is one man on earth who is able to compete with Divine Providence ; he is, besides, a poet, even if an inarticulate one, for to compete even so modestly with Divine Providence requires both poetry and an inexhaustible cheque-book. But what joy it must be to emulate Divine Providence and to bestow the kind of rewards suitable to our present-day ideals. For to put up statues to all heroes the world would soon be over-populated by stone images. And as for crowning heroes with laurels, there are really too many heroes to crown. It is therefore with a

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sane and practical outlook on life, and a realisation that it is tragic to put off gratitude until it is too late, that this inarticulate poet has solved the difficulty by turning laurels into money.

Alas, heroism is apt to be a nine days' wonder, if not less, and so in his wisdom he has elected to break that awful fall which awaits the hero after people have quite forgotten that he ever was heroic. There is really something soul-inspiring in this romantic use of millions! The mere reading of the deeds, for which, at best, only recognition can be given, not reward, makes one's heart swell with pride as one realises the glorious commonness of courage, besides which that of the old Valhalla heroes fades into insignificance. For our modern recognition of heroism is that in danger all men are equal and in heroism all men find their level.

The deeds for which the Albert and Edward medals are given, and awards made from the hero fund, are all the more inspiring because these heroes of peace are usually quite humble men, all of whom, with the exception of trained

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men like policemen and firemen, face emergencies undisciplined. And yet they are ready to risk their lives to save life un-inspired by emulation or any hope of recognition, and quite without that uplifting consciousness of noble accomplishment which must inspire the martyrs of science when they face a lingering death for the sake of progress and mankind.

Still, although we recognise heroism as never before, it sometimes seems as if the spirit of our electric age makes not so much for heroism as for pluck, that lesser quality because of its aims, which animates many a man who attempts high and dangerous adventure. For, indeed, men nowadays dare everything, no matter how perilous, for the joy of excitement and in the name of science, just as the Valhalla hero went in search of glory in the name of his peerless lady as flimsy excuse.

Although our modern recognition of heroism has broadened as never before, one wonders if it has penetrated farther than the outer edge of what is heroic? For, indeed, there is one hero whom the world has not yet learnt to recognise, and

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that is the everyday hero. A hero so commonplace that he is always overlooked, though he may be the most heroic of all. For, truly, the long-drawn-out, unrecognised bravery of a commonplace life may require more courage than the heroism of one supreme moment or the heroism of lingering, noble death. If there were only a V.C. that could be bestowed on the everyday, commonplace hero !

Even in the Valhalla days when the heroes rode forth to battle and glory and death, and that immortal ride with the Valkyries, it is quite possible that some nameless one was left behind to take care of the old people and the children, to keep up their courage and to do the thankless drudgery of life. Possibly he gave up youth, hope, and love for the sake of a commonplace duty, for which there is no Valhalla nor a V.C. Even the old people, possibly, never knew that the inglorious security of the one left at home demanded more courage than the going out to battle and death. They may even have despised him for remaining in safety, while all their hopes and prayers were centred on the one

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who had left them on his triumphant way to Valhalla.

It is no different now. Every family has such an unrecognised hero if they did but know it ; and, often enough, the hero is a heroine. And if they had a motto, which they haven't, being, as they ought to be, quite unconscious of their own heroic qualities, it would be the one word " Renunciation," and to renounce is so much harder often than to die ! For a heroic death may be of blessedly short duration, but a heroic renunciation may last through a long, dreary lifetime with no one to realise even at the end that it had been heroic. Who has not shaken hands with a hero who deserved a V.C. and yet whose life was never in greater danger than the going to and from business in a bus twice a day ? Who of us has not seen a smile that deserved an Albert medal ?

One longs to bring to the notice of the inarticulate poet with the hard head and the long purse, the everyday hero who has no idea that he is heroic. To say to him : Can you do nothing for unknown heroes who are sometimes the bravest of all ?

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Who sit cheerfully by their fireside and conquer their most implacable foe—their own hearts?

No, indeed, it is not always the man who fights nor the man who saves who is the greatest hero, but often enough, it is the man who suffers, and who wins with a smile. But, alas, for him there is no Victoria Cross in this world.

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## The Tyranny of the Past

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**S**INCE the days of the prophets not only the sins of the fathers, but also their virtues and genius, have weighed heavily on their unfortunate children. When we are not suffering from the sins of the past, we are crushed by its glory. Where's the justice?

The tyranny of the Past seems to be the one kind from which there is really no escape. One might suppose that the past, having had its day, would be willing to retire into its mists and give the present a chance. But it won't. It has a way of looming before us like an awful bogey, and instead of encouraging to emulation it paralyses by the conceded impossibility of rivalry. However, we have the consolation of knowing that there are one or two things in the present at which the past cannot sniff.

For instance, when it is a question of

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science, it is a comfort to feel that the science of the past is nowhere. Compared to modern science, it is only like a voice crying in the wilderness. The present has the supreme triumph of dangling the North Pole, radium, aviation, telephones, telegraphs, motors, the heart of Africa, the frozen Antarctic, sewing machines, cotton machinery, the harnessed forces of steam and electricity, and a few other trifles, in the face of the Past and feeling that at least so far the present has scored. And yet in spite of this glorious list we are still pursued by its unrelenting greatness. Our mental attitude towards it has always been grovelling. We say in a humble sort of way "The good old times," when we know perfectly well that they were neither so good nor so comfortable, so democratic, so safe, nor so just to every man as our own times—nor did they give each man so reasonable a chance of comfort and happiness.

Our age is the age of the exact sciences, and mathematics is its prophet, and we have only to study the amazing testimony of the patent offices to realise the immense

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## THE TYRANNY OF THE PAST

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intelligence of the average man. Fortunately for us in intelligence we have a republic in which there are neither class nor money distinctions, and its rewards are open to any man whom fate has endowed with brains. That ours is the age of the exact sciences is at once its glory and its humiliation, for it is characteristic of our human discontent always to want what one has not got. So there is a kind of tacit feeling that we could have wished our age had been great in something else. We suffer from an uneasy sense that the greatness of the exact sciences is only a passing greatness, and that an invention or a discovery, no matter how far-reaching in its influence, is at the mercy of the next great invention or discovery.

The sciences of the past served their turn in their day, and are now consigned to the dust of the garret. They are no longer sciences, but venerable curiosities. We realise that one day this may be the fate of our own, for our creed is that art alone confers immortality. And our age being great in quite new ways, we feel as uncertain of our standing as if we were

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parvenus in the history of civilisation, and in our over-modesty we are completely crushed by the arts of the past. Indeed, it would sometimes seem as if it were sufficient for an art to belong to the past to hall-mark it with greatness.

Not long ago I heard a distinguished critic speak on modern literature. In a charming and whimsical speech he offered us something which proved, at the end, to be a sugar-coated pill. And no matter how much sugar there is, a pill is a pill all the same. He compared literature to one of the sunken cities of the sea, whose bells a wanderer along the shore may sometimes hear, recalling forgotten splendours. He hoped, he said encouragingly, that the time would come when the waters would once more whirl asunder, and the lost city of the sea would rise again in all her glory. He said, furthermore, that there are no works like the old works, nor are there any characters which, like theirs, because of their vitality, are rather more real than life. The books of the past are like faithful friends, to whom one returns for consolation in sorrow, and refreshment

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in weariness, and that, indeed, only these books are worth re-reading.

Being so eminent a critic, one had to listen to him with respect, and, besides, he had the advantage of being in a position where no one could talk back. He was surrounded by the flower of English writers, and next to him sat the most celebrated woman novelist of England, who listened to this pæan of praise of the past, and had to draw the natural inference that of all the characters she has created, not one will ever be remembered, nor would any one take up one of her books again, after it had been once read, for either consolation or refreshment.

When the eminent critic sat down, such of his audience as wrote novels and poetry made a gallant effort to recover. A distinguished novelist sitting next to me awoke from a kind of stunned attention with a painful sigh, and remarked that he felt like going home and chopping his desk into kindlings. It was then that I realised, as never before, the awful tyranny of the past.

Not long after that there rose a wail

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over the whole land, emanating probably from some exhausted reviewers, against the deluge of new books. And, in a jocose appeal to stem the torrent, it was urged that it would be a mercy if authors and publishers would cease the one from writing and the other from publishing for a year, so as to give the world a chance to examine a fraction of the books which now die stillborn. There is some justice in the complaint, for it must be obvious that the increase of the population does not keep pace with the torrential output of books. Indeed, if it goes on at this rate, the average author will be reduced to a public of one which, on examination, will prove to be himself.

However, herein again we are suffering acutely from the tyranny of the past, and we would like to suggest, very modestly, that, instead of the above drastic remedy for a too prolific literature, we should lock up the masterpieces of the past for a year and make it a penal offence either to read them or to speak of them, and that, indeed, it would be profoundly wise to forget all about them. Whereupon the coast being

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clear, and our minds open to new impressions, we might turn an unprejudiced consideration to our contemporary literature, which is diffidently trying to sprout in the frosty shadow of the past, with which it is always being compared, to its eternal disadvantage.

We are suffering from a superlatively high standard of mediocrity, so high indeed that one could wish, for a change, that the past would be obliged to read the present. How the past would revel in it! Have we not charming stylists, original humorists, dramatists destined to immortalise modern life, poets who would have been called great had they been so lucky as to have lived in the past? Novelists, the freshness of whose invention, the charm of whose wit, whose comedy and whose tragedy would have earned them eternal fame, had they happened to be a legacy of the past, instead of belonging to the present with its glorious mediocrity. It is, perhaps, because the mountains are all so high, and there are so many of them, that no one peak towers over the rest.

If one thinks of some of those famous

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bygone old masters with their endless volumes, their broad humour, their fatiguing sentimentality, and the stilted prose of their pages, one must in justice acknowledge that the average art of the present compares triumphantly with that of the past, giving due credit to those splendid old fellows who were the pioneers, for the literary pioneers have as hard a time of it as other pioneers. While as for the giants of the past they really have had more than their innings, and they should, for a breathing spell at least, be allowed to rest in peace.

For instance, there is Shakespeare. Now we all know that Shakespeare is Shakespeare; more need not be said, and we do not require the prophets of the obvious to din his claim to immortality into our ears. He is England's glory, and long after England has gone to meet the fate that awaits every country which becomes too great, Shakespeare will still rise triumphant over her ruins. So there really is no need to advertise Shakespeare. Besides, he is so hopelessly discouraging! For he has set a supreme

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standard which has made only the third-rate attainable.

Indeed, the past seems to be a kind of immortal trust company, composed of these splendid old masters, and entirely run by the prophets of the obvious. Not that there are so many of these fine old immortals, but they are so unmercifully powerful.

Who of us has not been crushed by being told that what we have done has been done much better by some one long since dead and buried? To which one ventures to say in all humility, that there is nothing so easy to discover as the already discovered, and nothing so common.

One admits that Shakespeare is hopelessly discouraging. He is *hors concours*. There is only one modern who has had the glory of being compared to Shakespeare, and he not only survives, but, with sublime audacity, declares that the disadvantage of the comparison lies with Shakespeare.

But when it comes to the lesser giants of the past the modern men cannot escape comparison, to their eternal destruction. How many an aspiring young dramatist

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has been annihilated by Sheridan or Goldsmith? How many an inoffensive young poet, venturing into sacred verse, has been utterly destroyed by Milton? How many a well-meaning youth in an attempt to be lyrical has been routed by Shelley and Keats? Many a man attempting philosophic marble in poetry, has suffered very uncivil comparison with Wordsworth, while the unlucky person who makes an attempt to be a whimsical stylist, has to reckon with Charles Lamb.

When it comes to fiction, those of us who have diffidently essayed a historical novel, have we not been utterly annihilated by unfavourable comparison with Sir Walter Scott? While others, who have made timid efforts at satire, have they not been completely crushed by exceedingly unfavourable comparison with Thackeray? And one cannot really venture to describe London life without being exterminated by cruel references to the immortal Dickens. Indeed, there is no end to our sufferings from these disastrous comparisons.

Sometimes one wonders if the great ones are really so perpetually read, or if the

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## THE TYRANNY OF THE PAST

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prophets of the obvious only set them up as a hopeless standard of perfection, because it is so much easier to prophesy backwards than to prophesy forwards? However, some day we may have our turn and be made a standard. How nice that will be! Only one would like to be there and see the fun. But, alas, to be a standard one has to be dead! Yes, the past is always victorious.

The prophets of the obvious are for ever tooting the trumpet of praise of those who don't need it. If they would only expend their unnecessary enthusiasm in proclaiming a modern, struggling man, it might give heart to a genius who, also, has a message for his own age. It is so much easier to hold up the past as a standard of perfection than to chant the praise of Smith who lives in Shepherd's Bush, and who is producing an art about which the prophets shake their uncertain heads. It is so difficult to judge of the genius of a man with whom you may smoke a cigarette, or who rouses your resentment at the Club by sitting on the last edition of the evening paper.

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How few are the blessed prophets who have the gift to discover new genius independent of the praise and blame of others. They are possibly more rare than are those who have the genius to create a great art.

One wonders if the critics of his day realised that Shakespeare was destined to be the glory of England, or whether he too suffered from the giants of his past? One rather hopes he did, if only to balance matters. And then, too, one wonders if he knew that Fate had bestowed on him a genius which was destined to be supreme on earth? For the sake of his human happiness one hopes he did not. Fortunately the greatest never get a right focus of their own greatness, or they would not be the greatest. It is only the second- and third-rate who mistakenly think they do, but they only get a distorted and swollen vision of themselves, and that gives them swelled heads. Only the second- and third-rate suffer from swelled heads. One can recognise them by that.

Some day Smith, who lives at Shepherd's Bush, will also be in the past,

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and, after he is pleasantly reposing under a monument, he, too, will be discovered, and praise having, possibly, so far as we know, ceased to be of any use to him, he will receive it in overflowing measure. And then streets and overcoats and travelling-bags will be named after him, and his biography will be written, and his autographs will be bought up for America at famine prices. The chances are that in life he had all he could do to scrape along.

Still, every art on earth has its past and suffers from it. Go to Christie's, that last and awful tribunal, and listen to the starvation prices given for unknown modern work—probably very fine—and contrast them with the fortunes offered for the old Masters. Those cruel old Masters! Nor is it much comfort for a man of genius, who cannot make both ends meet now, to feel that absolute faith in himself, which makes him sure that some day a Christie of the future will sell his work at fabulous prices.

Yes, every art suffers from a relentless past. And sometimes one wonders, is it the art or the antiquity which weighs down

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the scale of prices? Or why was the "Flora" of Leonardo worth £9000, and the same "Flora" by Lucas nothing at all? Again the triumph of the past!

To give the moderns a chance one would like to exile temporarily, say to the North Pole, all the Sir Joshuas, Rembrandts, Titians, Gainsboroughs, Raeburns, Franz Hals, Velasquez, Holbeins, as well as all the rest of that immortal company who wander into Christie's and make the plutocracy open their cheque-books and write Arabian Night cheques! How many a man starves not from want of food, but from what is much more vital—want of recognition. And the futility of recognition, that comes just as the curtain falls. For as soon as a man is hall-marked by greatness, he already begins to belong to the past.

Then there is that other divine art which suffers so cruelly from its bygone greatness—Music. What a rigid trust company those old Titans formed! Their laws were as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and their prophets have been more bitter and bigoted and relentless than the pro-

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phets of any other divine art. How many a young composer has been laid low by the unrelenting laws of Bach and Gluck and Mozart and Beethoven, who in their day were also stoned, being prophets. Then Wagner came, and he was stoned in turn, for he, too, was a prophet.

Now other prophets have arisen, and Wagner has joined the past that stoned him, while the other men are being persecuted in their turn, until they, too, join the triumphant past. That is the way of life. However, music is growing so much less bigoted that now the younger men are sometimes allowed to tune up their little pipes without being annihilated by the prophets of the obvious. But the time was when a young composer had only to show his poor little head, and he had the past shied at him like a brickbat.

I heard a music enthusiast say to an eminent modern composer, about whom the prophets of the obvious have not yet made up their minds: "I have heard Beethoven's Fifth Symphony sixty-five times."

To which the modern composer, suffering

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from an inability to be heard at all, retorted grimly : “ What an ass you must be to be able to stand it ! ”

Then when it comes to that other great art, the Stage, is there one amongst them all more bound and fettered by tradition ? What actor essaying a classic rôle has not to suffer by comparison ? What actor would venture to free himself from the traditions of the past ? And if he does, how the prophets of the obvious come down upon him and demolish him utterly !

But, after all, it is not only through the arts that we suffer so cruelly. How the past tyrannises over families ! Who of us, for instance, can ever hope to rival a great father ? Indeed, to have a great father is one of the most serious drawbacks in life. By some natural but very unfair law if a great man uses up in one fell swoop all the genius which nature had intended for several generations, the result seems to be that his offspring have distinctly much less than the normal share. Which is very serious if you happen to be that offspring.

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Horsebreeders, who certainly know the laws of heredity, say that a great sire rarely, if ever, produces an equally great son. So, although it is gratifying to have a famous father, it is also rather discouraging. Therefore, if one wished to give some good advice to a child in search of parents, it would be to avoid a great father as an appalling calamity. If you happen to be the son of such a father, and are so unlucky as to have talent in the same art in which he has had genius, the chances are that your talent will only stimulate to gentle ridicule when, had you provided yourself with an ordinary father, the same amount of talent might have brought you in modest fame.

Supposing Shakespeare had had a son who also wrote plays? More need not be said. The only exception in favour of a great parent is to have a great mother, for it is conclusively proved that men of genius usually have had something remarkable in the way of a mother. On the other hand, a too beautiful mother is quite a different thing, and not at all desirable—at least for daughters. There are so many

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daughters who are handicapped by too beautiful mothers. Especially since science has quite eliminated the bogey of old age. For, really, nowadays, unless they carry about with them their certificate of birth, and they usually don't, mothers look no older than their own daughters, which is not quite fair, and particularly unfair if the beautiful mother annexes her rather plain daughter's young man. For such things have been, and it is really one of the minor but most trying forms of tyranny.

If, however, you want to be born to a contented and happy lot in life, with sufficient intelligence to gain respect, but not enough to arouse envy, find your way into a good, middle-class family, equally removed from the degenerating influence of grinding poverty and too great wealth. That is the best fate.

We poor human animals, only distinguished from the others by a spark of the divine, we are the only ones of superior breed whose mating is left to chance, and who, indeed, mate for the most foolish of reasons, and who transmit to the dim future not only our own sins but those of

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the past. Of course, there is a possibility that we may transmit our virtues, but it is a certainty that we shall transmit our sins.

Tradition is the heavy load with which we are weighed down. It may be a great possession, but, sometimes, it is a most serious burden. Most of the great families of this great nation are staggering under the heavy loads of their traditions. Sometimes they can only uphold them by calling to their aid the wealth and youth of America. Without these how could many of them shoulder their accumulated burdens ?

The tragedy of great, poor families, with their pitiful loyalty to the past !

Their young pitchforked out of the nest to make room for others, who will be pitchforked out in turn. The young men of such great, poor homes become dreary old bachelors, because they have nothing to marry on, to enable them to live as the family traditions require. Their pretty daughters become hopeless old maids, because they cannot find men of their own class to marry them, and men of another

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class will do to dance with, but not to marry.

So the past, like an awful car of the Juggernaut, rolls over all of them, and leaves them poor, hopeless and barren.

In nature a rotation of crops is necessary for the salvation of the soil. Possibly the same law holds good when it comes to humanity. Every age has its own greatness, although one is probably not greater than the other ; but all together they make for human progress. So a nation famous for its Art may, in the rotation of genius, become great in the exact sciences. A nation which has reached the height of philosophic attainment, becomes a nation of warriors. A nation in the thralls of some narrow, powerful, religious creed, becomes a nation without religion. A nation whose standard of virtue and goodness is money, becomes a nation whose gospel is that of poverty. A nation imprisoned in an island in the next age breaks bounds and conquers the world.

So the rotation of life goes on. But the greatness of the past should not overshadow the greatness of the present, or it

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will cease to be what the past should always be, a guide and inspiration, and degenerate into a tyranny. And the tyranny of the past is the greatest enemy to progress.

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## The Plague of Monuments

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**P**EOPLE nowadays are always banding together for the protection of something or other.

So when Oppressors unite and form trusts, and the Oppressed unite and form bombs, it is really high time that public-spirited citizens should try to protect unoffending cities from an irruption of statues in the open. For so far no soul has been found heroic enough to decline such works of art when offered to helpless communities.

Of course everybody likes a hero, and it is nice and elevating to see him emerge from the dead level of his fellow-men until he becomes Great, but even one's commendable and unselfish satisfaction is likely to be damped when one realises the inevitable result. Either before or after he is dead some busybody of a philanthropist, or some time-serving County

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Council, will have him done in stone or bronze, and he will be presented to the inoffensive town of his birth or his death, or, at any rate, some sacred spot where he did or where he did not pay his bills, and he will be set up, by the help of the town band, and that Eloquence for which the English are so justly famous. He will be erected in a special place where he will never again be seen except by infants in "prams" and their attendant nurses, and *their* attendant man. Or he will be placed where he is dreadfully in the way, and the object of unedited language of those gentlemen in leathers who kindly lead our motor-buses to destruction.

It is not that our Northern climate does not encourage heroes—far from it, on the contrary—but it has a very awful effect on their statues. The coal with which, for example, London tries to subdue its shivers, has ever been antagonistic to stone. Bronze, except that the hero usually turns pea-green, is more likely to survive the playful attacks of the weather. But, for instance, take a stone hero in whom the County Council shows but a languid interest, and it

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is painful to observe the havoc which our variegated weather, combined with coal-dust, can play with the most heroic features. As for the birds of the air, the portly pigeon, and that engaging young ruffian the sparrow, neither bronze nor stone can hope to escape their exceedingly bad manners. Inoffensive cities that have harmed no one should not be placed at the mercy of any misguided citizen aching for immortality, and who can get it in no other way than by hanging, as it were, to the coat-tails of a hero. The Misguided Fellow-Citizen presents the marble effigy of the Great to his fellow-townspeople, and he is permanently immortalised on the pedestal as "presented by our public-spirited townsman M. F. C., Esq." Probably he and the man who scrubs it once a year are the only two human beings who ever look at the great man, and it is more than sure that M. F. C., Esq., never looks higher than the pedestal.

The ordinary run of statues, unless they are royal, have only one really pleasant and satisfactory day in their existence, and that is the day they are unveiled.

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If stone, on that day they are spotlessly clean ; if bronze, they are nice and shiny. After that they are never clean or shiny again. It has to be the statue of a very exalted personage for the soot to be scraped off and to have its face washed once a year. The average hero has to be satisfied with being unveiled ; after that no one takes any further interest in him. But it is most instructive to observe the unholy skill with which the soot and other accidents of the air will lodge on the top of a venerable bald head, and on the surface of what should be an immaculate frock-coat or a well-fitting uniform. A Roman toga that has met with accidents is not half so ridiculous as a bronze frock-coat and immaculate bronze trousers that have been the scene of disaster. Standing in front of the statue of a great statesman, a man notably tidy in his day and a great worry to his valet, I studied the undignified results of a family of sparrows that had set up housekeeping under his elbow, and thought how indignant he would be if he could catch a glimpse of this unseemly domestic arrangement.

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There is no attire more unbecoming to a statue than the dress of an ordinary citizen. A hero may be very heroic inside, but no tailor has yet invented an heroic cut. A modern statue, with the exception of the face, is only a fashion-plate in bronze, and woe be to the sculptor if he leaves off a button. Happy is the statue that can hide its faulty anatomy in the mantle of a Knight of the Garter. But, unfortunately, this is a privilege granted to but few.

On the other hand, it is even worse when a harassed sculptor, yearning to free himself from the tyranny of clothes, flies off at a tangent and puts nothing, so to speak, but a sheet around his statue (which in life was, probably, a modest man carefully buttoned up), and so leaves him to the perplexed gaze of his fellow-citizens. One doesn't mind the old gods being lightly clad in a laurel-wreath or a thunder-bolt; one has been brought up to think of them that way. But when one sees an elderly if heroic gentleman in a classic arm-chair, with nothing on but a bathing towel, in the very street where, probably, he used to saunter up and down in uniform and pig-

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tail, or knee-breeches and cocked hat, one feels embarrassed and apologetic, as if one were intruding. What would the great George Washington say could he see his statue in front of the Capitol at Washington? How would that immortal man, who could not tell a lie, express his outraged feelings! Then, too, there is that seated statue of the sublime Beethoven, portrayed, evidently, as just receiving inspiration. He, too, is lightly and unostentatiously clad in a sheet, and with a generous display of rather muscular anatomy. How he would thunder forth his indignation if he could thus see himself!

Our Northern Climate, and its attendant evils, are death on statues in the open. Who will not agree with me who has ever wandered through London and happened on forgotten statues in forlorn vistas? Preferably these live in mouldy squares where sooty years have peacefully obliterated their features, and four-wheelers and taxis are usually anchored at their base. Sometimes there is a dingy drinking-fountain near, from which dirty little boys playfully squirt water at each other, or

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“shin” up the pedestal to the utter ruin of their breeches. Now is this the purpose for which a statue is erected?

Sometimes, when lost in the City, one stumbles across a forgotten philanthropist in bronze who, still true to his principles, furnishes a temporary escape from motor-buses and other death-dealing vehicles, while he sits there splashed with rich London mud, and more than ever a philanthropist.

Certain old statues London has quite overgrown, so that they overtop the stupendous traffic with a kind of infantile enjoyment. There is that remarkable statue of King Charles on his little horse in Trafalgar Square, for ever prancing down Whitehall and getting no further; and a small, unostentatious Milton leans modestly against St. Giles's, Cripplegate. In front of St. Paul's stands poor Queen Anne, disrespectfully described by a Jacobite lampooner: “With her face to the gin-shop, and her back to the church.” She looks all the more worn and dingy now, because her sceptre and crown have been daubed with some of that superabundant

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gilding left over when they desecrated the noble interior of St. Paul's. Poor Queen Anne! she has indeed been the uncomplaining victim of aspiring stonemasons and the weather! In Bloomsbury there is still another woebegone statue of her which is probably the most desolate in all London—and that is saying a good deal.

That part of Pall Mall where the statue of George III was erected, soon became known as Pigtail Corner. Here he may still be seen, a small, sleek figure mounted on a small, sleek charger, from which he perpetually and forgivingly reviews his ex-beloved American subjects trooping out of the Carlton Hotel. And does the loyal Carlton remember England's loss when making out its bills? The chances are that it does.

When a statue is not looking down at a drinking-fountain, it is sure to be gazing into a sand-bin—both, of course, very useful. The only statues that are really well off in London are those gallant gentlemen in Trafalgar Square who surround Nelson on his mighty column guarded by his gigantic lions. But

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even these are less impressive as statues, than as part of a magnificent architectural whole. Next to them the eminent men in Parliament Square are in luck, for not only are they in bronze, and shut in from the traffic, but three of them are fortunate enough to have on mantles. But, really, one's advice to a hero is—should his destiny be a statue—if you don't want to look ridiculous and be forgotten, get them to put you on top of a column. That is the only thing that will save you. But, indeed, you have to be a very great man to survive your statue !

It is indeed a very bad thing to be an open-air statue in our country. Still, there is something even worse than being a statue, and that is to be a bust on a pedestal. It must be so humiliating to have a pedestal grow out of so impossible a place ; as if one has no legs ! Besides, it is not true to Nature. Then, too, what is an added humiliation is that it shows so plainly that the money gave out. A bust on a pedestal in the open air betrays a transparent economy. Still, I remember one statue which was as bad as a bust on a pedestal,

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## THE PLAGUE OF MONUMENTS

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though it did have its legs, and that was an eminent statesman in granite, who had originally been made for a niche, but whom the exigencies of fate had placed in a park. This distinguished man had never been finished behind ; he was entirely without anatomy, and his coat-tails were quite rudimentary. Indeed, his whole back was sketchy ; and he really was behind as he would not have wished to be.

There is before the City Hall of a well-known American town a statue of Benjamin Franklin, that great man who helped to bring about the French Revolution by wearing woollen stockings, and so making little of the Court of France. On the *bas-relief* of the pedestal he is represented as working at his trade of printing, and it has been estimated by an inquiring mind that, at the rate his legs lie across the floor, this celebrated man could not have been less than sixty feet high. I am well acquainted with an inoffensive old square in a seaside resort, mercilessly ornamented with the Seasons in granite. The Seasons have never been able to escape the ruthless hand of the sculptor. These are four little

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statues done in unresponsive granite, and mounted on huge granite pedestals, each ostentatiously proclaiming, "Presented by Sir John Jones, Bart." Probably Sir John Jones, Bart., had bought them cheap at a sales day in a stonemason's yard, and then presented them to a helpless community.

One asks why should statues and other monuments be allowed to desecrate our public places, and our scenery? One cannot retire to a public garden to escape from the turmoil of motor-buses, traction engines, and Bath-chairs, without having one's solitude intruded on by unattractive gentlemen in bronze or dirty marble, not to speak of gods and goddesses and the Seasons, done, unfortunately, in a material that never perishes. There really should be a society for the annihilating of all philanthropists who will persist in presenting statues. If they can't be annihilated, then nothing remains to do—though it seems an extreme measure—but to suppress heroes!

When one looks about this grimy, smoky Northern world, where it rains a dirty

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## THE PLAGUE OF MONUMENTS

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liquid, and the fog playfully plasters the soot over everything, one asks why expose the immortal gods, the Seasons, miscellaneous heroes, as well as the members of the Royal Family, to such trying conditions? Why, with the problem of the unemployed always before us, waste precious money to erect monuments never beautiful in this climate, and never a gratification to any one but the sculptor, and, of course, his family? It has occasionally happened that a great man's statue has been erected during his lifetime. "I have to go all around the place to avoid that d——d thing," was the simple comment of one on his own effigy.

It is the misfortune of our worst statues that, though they decay, they are not utterly destroyed. They mildew in squares, and in forgotten and forlorn corners, but they never disappear unless they stand in the march of progress. I used to wonder what became of those scarred veterans of the Fine Arts, until one day I was enlightened. In that great and shabby London thoroughfare, the Euston Road, I came face to face with

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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some of them again ; an incongruous, motley stone crowd, weatherbeaten, grimy, minus a nose, an arm or a hand, all staring in different directions, and all waiting for some wandering art enthusiast to release them from ignoble bondage at any price.

There they stood in the stonecutter's shabby front yard : kings, queens, goddesses, the Seasons (of course), stags, heroes, and generals, looking like a kind of demoralised Westminster Abbey gone astray and in reduced circumstances. Of course they were the outcasts of the Fine Arts—the poor relations—and yet I was struck later on, when I was strolling through Westminster Abbey, by the family resemblance between those poor stone tramps of the Euston Road and their prosperous relations lodged in that glorious pile. As I wandered past these famous men in marble, I was impressed by the fact that they look like a kind of awful Mrs. Jarley's waxworks done in stone and without any fun. They are so wedged together without any earthly reference to each other, and with only one object, to give them standing room, that they really hit each other with

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## THE PLAGUE OF MONUMENTS

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their marble elbows, and they have no chance to show off their attitudes.

In suitable surroundings there is in all art nothing more impressive than a beautiful statue. It is the fit and noble ornament of public structures. A statue erected to the memory of the great dead is the supremest reward that can be bestowed, while, at the same time, it remains an eternal inspiration to the living. But to be this the work of the artist must be saved from the disfiguring vagaries of our climate, while, on the other hand, our cities should be saved from an irruption of bad statues.

Our County Councils are still in the kindergarten period of Art education, which has indeed caused one well-meaning borough to immortalise his late Gracious Majesty, King Edward VII in a stained-glass window, attired in the frock-coat and well-brushed silk hat which, though the Englishman's pride, are not *quite* suitable in stained glass. But there is his Majesty, pleasant and good to see, wearing a top-hat of stained glass, shinier than ever a mere mortal valet could hope to make it.

In Southern countries, under a cloudless

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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sky and the golden sunshine, in a clear, pure atmosphere, untouched by fogs and free from the burden of soot, statues may be erected in the open to the joy and glory of humanity. But here, if a great man cannot be remembered unless his dirty effigy on a dirty pedestal stands forlorn in the midst of taxis and four-wheelers, then let him in Heaven's name be forgotten! The erecting in the open of statues to the Great in our North is not so much a solemn duty as a very bad habit. Oh, the humour of the eternal unfitness of things!

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## The Minor Crimes

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**I**T has always seemed to me that it is not the great scoundrels who make the world so very annoying and unsafe, but, rather, the well-meaning though dangerous criminals of the minor crimes, some of the worst of whom are probably lurking in the very bosom of one's otherwise blameless family.

Sometimes I really think that a good many gentlemen languishing in penitentiaries and expiating a single crime, are not half so objectionable as those worthy and respected citizens who can look a policeman in the eye without trembling, and yet who commit those awful crimes for which an innocent and unsuspecting criminal code has, in its guilelessness, decreed no punishment.

An umbrella or a cane have within them potentialities for evil which are perfectly appalling. Many a worthy gentleman who

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goes to church on Sundays accompanied by his umbrella, is not only a self-acknowledged sinner, but he is, besides, what he doesn't suspect, a menace to the public. For as he files out, after having just requested to have his sins forgiven him, he is more likely than not to carry that umbrella across his shoulder or high under his arm, where the point endangers the eyesight of his fellow-man. Or he drags it in such a way that unwary sinners trip over it and make remarks that are distinctly out of place in the sanctuary.

Yes, umbrellas and canes are among the most dangerous of modern weapons. More harm is done by umbrellas poking and maiming mankind than by the deadliest ammunition known in warfare. In view of this, one would like to suggest modestly to the War Office that a regiment equipped with umbrellas, to be hoisted in the midst of an unsuspecting enemy, would do untold damage. Also regiments armed with sticks carried over the shoulder and playfully twiddled, would cause an amount of destruction compared to which a Maxim gun, no matter how lively but labouring

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## THE MINOR CRIMES

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under the disadvantage of being miles off, wouldn't be in it.

Even in private life there is nothing so destructive as an umbrella, especially in the irresponsible grasp of a woman. The umbrella seems to be endowed with a sentient existence all its own, and its gambols, when not fatal, are of a most painful playfulness. Really the owners of some umbrellas deserve a long sentence with hard labour much more than many an erring man whose crime has been, possibly, more ostentatious but less subtle.

Another very dangerous instrument for the annihilation of the human race, is the fruit peel irresponsible citizens of all ages and classes scatter over the pavement. I don't see my way to utilise this danger in warfare—though that may be trustfully left to our war-lords—but one can study samples of the fatal effects when a bit of peel—the kind of fruit is really immaterial—invites the unwary to sit upon the pavement with appalling suddenness. Upon which the earth is strewn with miscellaneous property, such as muffs, sticks, umbrellas, bowler hats, the daily paper,

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that last sweet ballad, "Let me kiss him for his mother," a pair of spectacles, a batch of laundry done up to look like a brief, and two kippers that emerge bashfully out of a brown paper parcel. What martyr to a bit of peel has not felt the immortal stars detached from Heaven to find a temporary resting-place in his head? I consider an infant with an orange, with all that represents of danger, as more menacing to the public peace than a turmoil of mistaken but well-meaning anarchists in Trafalgar Square, who merely talk about bombs. Talk about bombs! Why, what bomb is so dangerous as the irresponsible peel of an orange?

Another terrible instrument of the minor crimes is music. Music is an awful weapon in the hands of minor criminals next door, or in flats. I once lived near a villain who tried to play the French horn; a French horn is a brass instrument with an independent will of its own. You blow in one thing and the chances are that it will come out something quite different. For six months he practised playing "She never told her love," from 9.30 p.m. until

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midnight. If she had only lived up to it ! Finally the cruel instrument moved, but now the very sight of a French horn in an orchestra makes me quail !

A piano is another frightful instrument of torture. I always feel rather sorry for the Inquisition that it missed this magnificent opportunity for directing a fearful weapon against the defenceless and the oppressed. The most hardened heretic after having the C major scale with variations, and other five-finger exercises decorated with false notes, drummed into his ears by an innocent child next door for days and nights, will be glad and happy to confess to anything, if only to escape with a remnant of reason. If the Inquisition could only have known !

Pianos in hotel parlours are another scourge. The medium of torture is usually a travelling infant plumped before the keys to keep it quiet, while "Mother" refreshes her intellect with fashion papers six months old. Or an elderly maiden lady wanders in who claws mid-Victorian melodies out of the key-board with stiff and feeble fingers. Then there are always one or two girls in the latest thing in hair-fluffs, who rush in

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and make a bee-line for the piano and bang away at the latest Gaiety tunes till the windows rattle, and an elderly gentleman in a corner, who is taking a nap behind an illustrated paper, rises in wrath and ostentatiously scowls his way out. Yes, music is the cruellest of the fine arts, and ought to be chained and padlocked, and not turned loose on a long-suffering public, under pain of instant death.

Connected with music there is another dangerous criminal, and that is the amateur musical critic. He is always armed with the score, and he labours under the delusion that the audience is stone-deaf. He *is* a trial to the sufferers about him ! Glare at him with double distilled venom and he remains quite unmoved. He is always accompanied by a kindred soul with long hair that has an inward curl, and he wears the necktie of genius, which is soft. There is nothing I so loathe as a score ! The pages are always turned so that the rattle comes in with the *pianissimo*, just when the conductor stands on the tips of his toes and broods over the orchestra as if ready for flight. The amateur critic despises

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people who cannot follow a score, and sometimes he commits murder with his eye if some innocent victim ventures to whisper. However, he does not hesitate to talk very loud himself. But he has the divine right because he has the score. At ardent climaxes he kindly hums the melody, and when the orchestra has perpetrated the last crash, he bursts into perfect ecstasies of abuse, because there's no sense in praising anything; for to praise only shows you don't know!

All critics are very awful people, because one never knows when one's own turn may come. But on studying the theatrical critic one observes that he, too, labours under the fond delusion that the audience is deaf, or, if it isn't deaf, that it has come to hear a running commentary on the play and the players, who are referred to by their private names. So it is a little discouraging, when one has paid for one's seat and one's soul is bathed in illusion, to hear Polydorus the brave, who is on the point of rescuing the Christian martyr in white cashmere from the lions in the arena, referred to as Podkins; Podkins being his

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name in private life. Nor is it convincing to have a *sotto-voce* synopsis of the Christian martyr's rather giddy private life as an accompaniment to her sufferings on the stage. I cannot help thinking that if the critics had to pay for their seats, as we humble sufferers do, they would approach the drama with more respect.

Did you ever sit behind the kind man who has taken a deaf friend to the theatre and obligingly repeats tit-bits of the speeches to him, as well as a running description of the plot? It is particularly discouraging for the surrounding sufferers when the deaf gentleman, who has but a vague idea of the story, mistakes the tragedy for a comedy.

Among others there are what may be called the silent crimes. Reading rooms at clubs are the scenes of some of the most awful of these. What is it in newspapers that exercises such an unholy effect on otherwise inoffensive and honest gentlemen, who away from their baleful influence could not be induced to possess themselves dishonestly of a penny? But study them in the club reading-room and see

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## THE MINOR CRIMES

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them make a dive for all the newspapers within reach! Trembling with eagerness and cupidity, they collect them in a mountainous pile—leaving out only one, always the most popular of the illustrated—and upon these they sit. Whereupon, with the illustrated one as a screen, they sleep the sleep of the unjust, which in this erring world is always very peaceful and sound. Brother clubmen venture within the radius of their snores, and glare, but it is the unwritten etiquette of clubs that what you sit on becomes yours by a kind of divine right. No, newspapers are not only constructed for a diffusion of knowledge.

Perhaps of the entire human anatomy nothing is more admirably adapted for crime than elbows. The execution that can be done by a judicious use of these usually sharp instruments of destruction is amazing. They are conceded to be an essentially feminine weapon: and yet I have seen them used with great success by men. I myself have had the honour to come in violent contact with the elbows of a great dignitary of the Church, when we were both making for the same railway

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carriage of a special train—the object being a garden-party. I always acknowledge the divine supremacy of man, and I did so again as he plunged victoriously into the only vacant seat, and gave me in parting—as I stood forlorn on the platform—the heavenly benediction of his smile.

The prevailing characteristic of the age is undoubtedly bashfulness. Who has not seen a weak but determined woman triumphantly hold a bashful humanity at bay while she kept three vacant seats in a crowded hall for belated friends? Nobody ventures to take those empty chairs she has appropriated by a right sacred to herself. The world passes furiously but shyly by, and leaves the gentle pirate triumphant.

Who has not met that travelling criminal, also the foe of the bashful, who, armed with kit-bags, tea-basket, dressing-case, shawl-straps, and those brown paper parcels so characteristic of the British traveller, plumps them in three corners of the only empty railway carriage of a popular train, and himself into the fourth. Then, buried behind the genial shelter of a newspaper, he permits other harassed

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travellers to look wildly in, but on being confronted by seats so obviously reserved, tear madly on, vanquished though unconvinced. The experienced traveller behind his paper has the rapture of seeing them race up and down the platform in a flight of frenzy, or cling to the harassed guard, who has a shilling in his pocket for which he could not conscientiously account to the railway company.

Some of the most dangerous weapons for the perpetration of the minor crimes are children. I remember with terror a small boy of eight whose laudable ambition in life was, of course, to be a pirate. But to become a pirate a pistol is indispensable, and so his fond parents presented him with a revolver. I was visiting at their country place when it arrived in company with a stock of cartridges. The next morning the dear child came down to breakfast with the weapon of destruction loaded to the muzzle and hanging from his neck by a string. I nearly fainted over my bacon and eggs.

“He’s sure to kill somebody,” I prophesied, “and I won’t stay here a moment

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longer if he is going to wear that dreadful thing as a necklace.”

So, after much coaxing from his proud father, the young pirate was persuaded temporarily to divest himself of his weapon and to lay it on the table beside his porridge. He bolted his breakfast and flew off with the war whoop of a wild Indian, and made the landscape so unsafe with his ammunition that I took the earliest afternoon train back to my quiet home.

“You are such an old maid,” my friend said scornfully as we parted, “no wonder children don’t appeal to you.” “It isn’t that, dear girl,” I said, conscious of a want of heroism, “but I should be mortified to death to be killed by such a little boy.”

In this connection I cannot overlook the terrible danger, also, of unloaded weapons. It is always the unloaded weapon which, pointed playfully at you, immediately blows your head off. Not the other person’s, but yours. I never can reconcile myself to the result. But retribution is a funny thing, and I find it is usually meted out to the innocent. One

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would like to advocate the use of unloaded weapons in warfare. The effect would be so deadly.

Another sinister weapon most dangerous to society is a door. A heavy door slammed with an accelerated impetus, can do any amount of damage to the innocent coming behind. Every door has its own private and pet danger, but to get the best results open it as far as it will go, don't look back, and just let it slam for all it is worth. The result is always successful, for you are sure to hit somebody. The other day a light-hearted slammer broke an innocent nose that was following on behind. One is conscious of a want of discrimination in the decrees of fate, or it wouldn't have been that blameless nose that was so sacrificed. Swearing is a great safety-valve for the passions, and it is less reprehensible than murder, though there are occasions when a little judicious murder might really be overlooked.

Some of the most terrible of the silent crimes are committed by the Casual. The criminal proclivities of the casual are amazing, and what makes it all the worse is that

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the casual are usually so very amiable ; but that is probably due to their leaving all the unpleasant emotions to others. Still, one of their engaging peculiarities is that they do hate to have other people casual to them ; on the same principle, probably, that one can contemplate the sufferings of one's friends with great fortitude though one has a distinct aversion to suffering one's self. It is also interesting to note that the casual are called by different names according to the society in which they move. In the lowest class, where people still show their feelings, they are called rude, but as they ascend in the social scale they are not called rude, but just casual, which is really the same thing, only it sounds more refined.

Of course it isn't the Great who are casual, but the imitation great. The casual are always unpunctual. When a man begins to feel his greatness sprout, he realises that it is due to his dignity always to come late ; it's the first step, and it shows that he is getting on. The next step—by this time he feels that he has arrived and that he is Great—he forgets

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to come at all. Some of the casual have made the crime of coming late a fine art. To time their belated and longed-for presence so as to arrive, as it were, at the boiling point, is indeed a great and fine art. To arrive at the dramatic moment at a dinner-party when, in her relief, the hostess greets you with an exaggerated effusiveness, and so gives your arrival an importance which it would never have had had you come in time, is a social triumph.

Punctuality is an unamiable virtue and very plebeian in everyone but a king. It is always the punctual who lose their tempers waiting for the unpunctual, and to lose your temper is the thin end of the wedge for the perpetration of the worst crimes. I suppose the angels are always unpunctual, or they wouldn't be so sweet-tempered. I don't believe the punctual are ever destined to be angels, for already on earth they get so soured. So one cannot help thinking that Heaven must be a rather unpunctual place.

It is the casual who borrow your books and forget to return them. A friend of mine bought a stray volume at Sotheby's

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to replace one that had disappeared years before out of a priceless set, and when he opened it his own book-plate stared him cheerfully in the face, and the criminal had gone to that bourne where he was safe even from the wrath of a collector. Possibly he was only casual, but the result was the same.

Books seem to exercise a wicked influence on human beings. Besides the books that are borrowed and never returned, there are those poor victims that leave your shelves so upright and neat, and return with broken backs, and rings on their covers, and dog-ears on the corners of their melancholy pages, and here and there a hardened drop of candle-grease to suggest midnight vigils. Much better never to see them again than to see them in such a pitiable plight.

Among other silent victims to the minor crimes is the poor and humble author. Not only do his immortal works not circulate with that vivacity which he could wish, but well-meaning friends try to borrow his last book from him, so as to save swelling the lordly revenues of the circu-

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lating library by "tuppence." If the dear, kind world could only be made to comprehend that even an author cannot live wholly on laurels!

Then there are those benevolent people who, to encourage the author, ask the humble man to give them his dear little book autographed. Even the meekest of authors sometimes wonders in perplexity, "Why?" Do we, when we are so lucky as to know a brewer, ask him, as a compliment to himself, to send us a barrel of beer to remind us of him? When we circulate in society and meet a distinguished tailor, do we beg him to present us with a new suit of clothes made invaluable by his autograph? Do we ask a railway director, at whose house we may happen to dine, to send us a free pass over his roads? Not usually. What would these prosperous gentlemen say at the mere suggestion? But the poor author is always the uncomplaining victim of an inexpensive patronage, and, really, he can afford it less than most!

Another weapon of destruction essentially feminine, but none the less deadly

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because of that, is the hat-pin. It is probably the invention of some misanthrope aching to exterminate the human race. It is the modern dagger, and has infinite possibilities in the way of low-down tragedy eminently suitable for police-courts, if not for the higher social circles. Considering its death-dealing qualities, it is a source of real dramatic interest to see the feminine hat bristle with half a dozen of these terrible weapons, preferably with their cruel points protruding inches beyond the hat. Yet, such is the innate power of women, that up to the present there has been no legislation against these innocent criminals. What would we say if our fathers and husbands carried about in their respectable pockets six-shooters loaded to the hilt? Now, is not a hat-pin as dangerous to society as a loaded revolver? A girl, no matter how pretty, who bristles with the points of obtrusive hat-pins is a menace to the public welfare and should be legislated against, like mobs and invasions.

Society simply bristles with criminals. Even dinners, usually dangerous only to

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the digestion, have been turned into ruthless weapons for the destruction of the Shy. The agony of a bashful man who is called upon unexpectedly by an easy and fluent chairman to answer to a toast, is something which mere words cannot describe. The terror which ties his knees into knots, and makes of his voice something which either hits the roof of his head or rises out of the soles of his boots, is an anguish to which no one can do justice. The sufferer is probably not a drivelling idiot in private life, but nobody would suppose so to judge by the few remarks he pumps out of his parched throat, and emits in instalments by the aid of a tongue like red-hot and very heavy lead. His jaws creak with an awful stiffness, as if they were carved out of paste-board, he glares frantically about and sees nothing, and does awful things with his table-napkin, and finally, having given up all earthly hope, he plumps wildly down, and no amount of champagne can make him forgive the genial man who has encouraged him to make such an ass of himself. Yes, society is full of agonies as well as crimes.

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There is another criminal in society one would dearly like to see exterminated, and that is the beast who, having by some contemptible and underhand method, become acquainted with your best after-dinner stories, accompanies your recital—and you are in capital form—with an ingratiating grin like a hyena, and a benevolent and confirmatory nodding of his head. And just as you have nearly reached your climax, and the guests are hanging spell-bound on your words, and are rewarding you with anticipatory chuckles, he bursts out with your point just five seconds before you can reach the winning post. This is another instance when a little manslaughter should be excused.

On the other hand, there is that innocent sufferer, the man who forgets his point. Society is full of people who would be so interesting if they could only remember what they meant to say. If any enterprising publisher would collect the speeches that are never made, and the anecdotes that have everything but a point, as well as the jokes that are forgotten, he would produce volumes of thrilling interest.

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The other night, at a dinner-party, we were favoured by a most delightful anecdote about the fair Melusine, who, as everybody knows, was half the time a woman and the other half a serpent. The excellent gentleman who was entertaining us with the story got, however, slightly mixed as to the particular beast into which the fair Melusine was periodically turned. His point was intended to be that the husband of the fair Melusine was singularly fortunate inasmuch as his wife was a serpent only half the time, at which climax he could confidently reckon on frantic hilarity both from the married men as well as the more innocent bachelors.

Unfortunately, in the excitement of recital he couldn't think of the animal required for the point. Nothing would come to his agitated consciousness but a whale. So when he said, with a smile which grew more uncertain as he approached his climax, that the husband of the fair Melusine was singularly lucky, as his wife was a whale only half the time, even the most charitable of diners-out looked perplexed, and vainly tried to see

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the joke, and rewarded him with perfunctory smiles that were pathetic. The man sent me the point on a postcard the very next morning.

There is no end to dinner crimes. The other evening I was at a great banquet for which a very impressive personage, all hung with stars and things, had been captured as ornamental chairman. Behind his noble back were draped the flags of those two great nations that have two independent pieces of poetry and one tune. The toast-master hovered anxiously over the eminent chairman, and as I looked into the chairman's red face, decorated with early Victorian whiskers, I had a dreadful suspicion that he knew but vaguely why he was there.

Like the immortal brook, the speeches proceeded to flow on for ever. Finally a busy little committee-man darted up to the noble chairman and whispered frantically into his ear, and I felt at once, from the jerks of his head, that he referred to a lonely man, one removed from the chairman, who bore on his features the stamp of America as well

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as an only partly concealed dissatisfaction.

The committee-man retired and the toast-master in stentorian accents cried, "Silence for your noble chairman." Whereupon the noble chairman rose to those feet his ancestors had so cruelly endowed with gout, and vouchsafed us his best British eloquence.

As I listened I happened accidentally to look at the lonely gentleman with the dissatisfied expression, and I observed samples of different emotions chasing across his expressive features.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the noble chairman after a great deal of eloquence had got lost behind his shirt collar, "I have the gratification of introducing to you one of the most distinguished citizens of the great Republic. A man famous in her councils and even more famous in the still greater republic of letters; a man whose name is a household word. Ladies and gentlemen, Major-General Jabez B. Tompkins of America."

Here, as the noble chairman looked benevolently across at the dissatisfied

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stranger, the stranger met his glance with unconcealed malevolence.

“Hopkins,” he hissed across at the noble chairman. “My name is Hopkins!”

For a moment the chairman was staggered, but then he came gallantly to his own rescue.

“The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the name that is a—a—in fact, a household word is—is—in fact, is Hopkins.” Whereupon he sat down rapidly amid thunders of applause.

Yes, it is the minor crimes that make the world so dangerous and unsafe, and life so trying. It would be such a comfort if Parliament would legislate against them! Only the result would be that most of the inhabitants of this erring world would be in penitentiaries, which might be somewhat of a drawback. Still, it would be nice if one could at least chop off the heads of a few of these genial criminals, if only as an example.

The world is alarmingly full of well-intentioned criminals, who are all the more dangerous because there are no laws to protect us against them. Parliament

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really ought to do something about it, only the trouble is that, probably, Parliament itself consists entirely of minor criminals.

Still, it does make the laws such as they are, and if it would only make it a penal offence to be casual, to slam doors, to forget to come, to tell the other man's best story, and heaps of other crimes, the result would be quite as beneficial and important as its penal laws for the major crimes. A gentleman who commits a murder knows what will happen to him if he is ever caught, so he discreetly avoids society and usually doesn't do it again. But the gentleman who keeps your dinner waiting for half an hour is not punished—no one arrests him, no one chops off his head—so he repeats his offence over and over again, and society has no earthly redress. In fact, he is a bold, bad character whom we constantly invite in spite of his crimes, and his motto of conduct is, "Don't care a d——n."

If Parliament would only come to the rescue and consider the awful importance of the minor crimes, what a beneficent

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effect it would have on the temper of the world !

And, indeed, after a serious study of life, one comes to the conclusion that there are really no minor crimes, but that all, even the little bits of ones, are major, dreadfully major—though, possibly, in disguise.

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## The Craze for Collecting

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**C**OLLECTING is a safety-valve for the passions. I do not believe that a collector ever commits suicide or dies of a broken heart, nor, indeed, is it possible for a lover to be a collector.

To collect, from buttons up, is to give yourself over, heart and soul, to a fierce, engrossing passion, which exceeds in dynamic force every other passion in the world, for it contains them all. You may get tired of the most frantically beloved one, but you never get tired of those delightful things you have gathered together with such infinite patience. You may hate a rival, but you will never loathe him with the unspeakable loathing the collector feels towards the other man who has carried off what he wants.

Yes, collecting is evidently Nature's safety-valve, and heaven knows what some

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people would do if they had not such an outlet. I know a man who was saved from a drunkard's grave by a stamp album, and a girl with a broken heart who recovered when she took to collecting lustre ware.

There has been a craze for collecting since the world began. The first historic collection of which we know was, of course, the animals in the ark. So Noah may be considered the patron saint of collectors, and to him we owe the modern "zoo." Traces of other collections have been lost, but I am quite convinced that with the appearance of the first button in the world, which at latest must have been a week after Adam and Eve were turned out of the Garden of Eden, was started the first collection of buttons. It is no use longing for one of these prehistoric buttons, but it does prove the folly of throwing anything away! Keep a thing long enough, and it is sure to become precious, no matter how hideous and common it is. Why is that horrid old kitchen jug of Fulham ware two hundred years old, that has withstood the well-meant ravages of time, elevated to the drawing-room, where it curls a scornful

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lip? Its only claim to distinction is that it has escaped the pursuing duster for two hundred years. Will the millions of things that disgrace our uncomplaining walls and shelves, be in their turn the foundation of collections? Heaven forbid! And yet the only thing that makes them ineligible is that they are brand-new.

I am inclined to think that it is the fault of Americans that the world pays such respect to age—the only exception being old age. Americans adore everything that is old, as they are themselves so new. With what enthusiasm they go on pilgrimages to what is ancient, with what eagerness they ask how old a thing is or a place, before they venture to go into ecstasies! Yes, indeed, age covers a multitude of sins. Intrinsic value is a minor consideration; it is always great age, a great price, or possibly a great name.

“What a dreadful old daub!” a simple young republican said, staring at a picture.

“My dear,” was the answer, in shocked surprise, “that is a Rubens.”

That made all the difference. The simple young republican discovered new beauties,

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and then inquired the market value. Have you ever noticed what a queer influence the market value has on the average? Most people refuse to believe in what is cheap, even if it is good. Women love to buy cheap things, although down in their contradictory hearts they despise them.

The born collector is the only one who really rejoices and boasts when he buys things cheap. Indeed he scorns the millionaire, even if he does envy him, who trusts to agents and draws a cheque, and whose priceless collection does not represent love and knowledge, but simply vanity. Again, it is the American with a long purse, no experience, and educated by protection, which gives him a wrong idea of values, who has entered the collecting field and spoiled it for all the world. The innocent Europeans, in spite of their heroic emulation, have not yet mastered the science of charging as practised by the astute American shopkeeper; and, though one must confess that they are on the high road to success, they have not yet arrived. There is a kind of surprised, whole-souled American who is doing her level best to help the

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innocent European to a proper knowledge of values. It was truly a lesson in the highest innocence when an American friend accompanied me to a bandit's cave, in other words an antique shop, where I had been coquetting with some old silver. She flew in with radiant good-humour, and she priced every blessed thing.

"Isn't it cheap?" she cried in benevolent rapture. "Why, I'd have to pay five times as much in America." Here she caught the cold disapproval of my eye.

"And how much are these spoons?" I asked of the frigid goddess who presided.

The goddess made a stiff mental calculation, and to her visible regret charged me only double what she had before. I could follow the struggle in her mind. I remonstrated.

"I made a mistake the other day when Madam inquired," she replied without the ghost of a blush.

"That," I said reproachfully to my friend as we retired into the street, "is the result of the American invasion. I am sick to death of it! What an old goose you are!"

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And so, having expressed my sincere feeling, there was a coldness between us.

To the true collector, to get a good thing cheap is a science. To get it at its full value is vulgar. And, indeed, it is a science to get things cheap in these days of board-schools, electricity, and Americans. Everybody knows the value of everything—for intelligence and shrewdness are so dismally common! You may have a find that makes you hold your breath, but, before you really get it, it escapes to Christie's. What you offered £20 for, and staggered the owners by your generosity—who became suspicious, and hesitated—was sold at Christie's for 9000 guineas. It happened the other day to a real, authentic Romney. Possibly many priceless masterpieces are still knocking about in old garrets, but the chances are that the whole countryside has been ransacked for dear life, and that many an old daub—fit company for mice—has been transferred to undeserved glory below.

It is not the director of a great art gallery, and the millionaire who have the joy of collecting ; it is rather the modest man who

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pokes about in pawnbrokers' shops, rag-and-bottle shops, second-hand book shops, and other possibly still somewhat unsophisticated places, and who picks up little odds and ends that have escaped the lynx-eyed dealers. O, but you have to be wary indeed, and knowing and unmoved of countenance. You have, judiciously, to offer just enough not to excite suspicion, and it is always wise to be a little shabby. As for the wary American, I advise him to leave his accent behind!

Have I not myself wandered humbly in the footsteps of a collector? I have swallowed more dust, bad air, and microbes—the unpleasant kind—in second-hand shops than I like to think of. I remember following at his heels in a little seaport town, and straying into a grimy book-shop. He was asked sixpence for what seemed to me a very dingy print indeed. It was the dustiest kind of shop, crammed to the black ceiling with aged and dirty books that nobody wanted.

My collector followed me out with a roll under his arm. He was rather flushed.

“ A Sir Joshua, a mezzotint engraving by

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J. R. Smith. Lady Hamilton as Bacchante. Excellent state. A find," he said, a little out of breath. But, of course, you have to know.

Another collector strayed into a shabby old book-shop in the city. There was a bag on the counter stuffed full of all sorts of odds and ends of paper ready for the dust-cart. "Do you mind my looking them over?" he asked, then tipped them out slowly, and finally picked up a shabby pamphlet. "How much?" and he turned to the shopman.

"A penny."

He walked off with the prize, which was a first edition of Thackeray's "The Second Funeral of Napoleon." He was afterwards offered £26 for it. These are only trifles that go to prove how easily precious things are ignorantly destroyed.

I feel sure that the imitation antique market has received its greatest impetus from America. Every country manufactures its pet spuriousities, and Americans troop over to buy them. They are a keen, canny people enough, but they have a childlike confidence and innocence which

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have betrayed the most astute financial schemer, and saddled him with an imitation Gainsborough at a fabulous price. They are the great patrons of bad Dutch silver, frightful "old masters," imitation oak-carving, old china manufactured yesterday, and Chippendale still sticky with varnish. They have also that characteristic of all new people, one is told it is also true of the Japanese, that they like to do things for themselves. They get rid of their teachers as soon as possible, and often enough pay for their cock-sure independence by being taken in.

We have an old friend who was uncertain whether to marry or to collect. He finally chose the latter as being cheaper in the end. His Mecca was London ; he had heard of the treasures of Wardour Street, Great Portland Street, and the Brompton Road. He was very green, though he thought he knew a thing or two ; but out of sheer benevolence our expert went with him on that first intoxicating revel in antiquities. He longed for prints. He wanted beautiful ladies with wonderful clothes. After a whole morning's hunt he came home dis-

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spirited with an elderly and fatally Victorian bishop under his arm.

“Beautiful ladies in a good state are at famine prices,” the expert explained, “and this worthy gentleman is cheap at ten and six.”

We all said he was a tiresome bishop, and what did he mean by being taken without even an apron!

I saw revolt in our friend's eyes. The next day he eloped by himself in a taxi and was gone for hours, and when he finally returned home his arms were full of rolls, and he bore a portfolio.

“Catch me ever buying another bishop,” he cried in triumph. “Just look at the heavenly creatures! Why, the Brompton Road is full of 'em.”

When I saw all those lovely ladies unrolled and pinned against the wall, I was temporarily disloyal to the expert. Fifteen divine females languished down at me in every state of undress, with too much clothing where it was not needed, and none at all where it would have been highly discreet.

“As if I couldn't tell,” said the enrap-

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tured collector, with a sense of injury. "Let's pin them up and surprise him when he comes home. After all, I guess we Americans can teach an Englishman a thing or two."

When the expert returned he looked hastily about at the surprise. "For goodness' sake, take them away; they make me sick," was his only comment, but when he heard what our friend had paid for his collection he groaned. One very improper lady had cost fifteen pounds.

"It isn't worth five shillings," was all he said. But the next morning he took him and the prints back to the Brompton Road, and confronted several worthy shopkeepers, bristling with outraged honesty. "I know about prints, even if this gentleman doesn't. I want you to take them all back."

Now, this, they swore by all the gods, they couldn't and they wouldn't—and who can blame them? But they offered to exchange the prints for any of the other priceless "curios" in the shop. The expert sniffed as he gazed at the rest of the dusty collection. It was really leaping from the frying-pan into the fire. So our disillusioned

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friend and his fifteen ladies returned in a taxi, and he finally took them to America, and smuggled them in with Machiavellian precautions because of those art experts, the United States Custom-house inspectors. They now form the nucleus of his great print collection which he has decided to leave to the State Art Museum.

It is so cruel of the United States to put such an unfeeling tax on everything that comes from across the water. There are "curios" and worm-eaten imitations in every seaport warehouse in Europe waiting for the tariff to relent.

I wonder what is the special punishment in store for those misguided beings in the hereafter who make brand-new oak carvings look five centuries old, and ornament them with authentic worm-holes? I used to be convinced by worm-holes, but now I know better. As for Chippendale, what crimes are committed in that venerable name! Future generations will not call it Chippendale, but simply and honestly Tottenham Court Road.

How well I remember a worm-eaten oak

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chest bought by an enthusiastic Australian friend from a dealer whose eyes looked one straight in the face, so conscious was he of his childlike rectitude. He said, at least so I understood, that it had belonged to Alfred the Great; at any rate the carvings represented that celebrated monarch burning the historic cakes. Our Australian friend only paid twenty guineas for this treasure, and his soul rejoiced as he thought how he had taken in the innocent antique man. In his triumph he confided his "find" to an expert collector who happened to call at the same time.

"My dear sir," this one replied, with a cruelty natural to a rival, "get 'em to take it back. All fake, sir, all fake. There were no such carvings at that time, and if they were genuine, which they can't be, they would be worth thousands where you paid guineas. Change it for Chippendale. Oh, yes, Chippendale," and an awful grin stretched his mouth. And our Australian, torn by doubt, exchanged it for a tea-pot (Georgian), and I have since passed a duplicate chest with

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the same carvings of that estimable monarch at his domestic employment, in Praed Street, where the buses splash mud against his royal legs.

I shall always remember a box sent to our care by another friend who was poking about the Continent seeing what she could pick up. It contained, she wrote, a priceless bit of old Leeds which she had discovered in a shop, covered with dust and cobwebs. I remember she made a great point of the dust and cobwebs. When it was finally unpacked in our presence, and some of the reassuring dust was wiped off, she challenged my expert to name its value.

"Well," said the expert, turning it over very gingerly, "I should say it was well paid at one and sixpence ; but, of course," as he saw the horror in her face, "I am not counting the dust."

"One and six!" she cried in anguish, "why, I paid five guineas for it, and then the man said it was the bargain of my life! And he *had* such honest blue eyes," she added with feminine irrelevancy.

I remember the scorn with which the very distinguished director of one of the greatest

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## THE CRAZE FOR COLLECTING

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museums in the world spoke of "curios." "Curios" was the watchword of the irresponsible gadder-about after trifles. A collection, he said, should be quite apart from sentiment. Sentimentality he abhorred. Still, most people would not agree with him. So many things have no intrinsic value, and it is only association which gives them a fictitious one. Of what value would the tooth of Julius Cæsar be if one did not happen to know that it had ached in the head of that great man?

That fatal passion for "curios" is, undoubtedly, due to the Japanese, and it is the only grudge one can owe these great and enlightened people. It is but a poor satisfaction that time is revenging herself by teaching this progressive nation all our bad and cheap methods. But it was awful, the period when Japan and China poured their worst art into the lap of the West, and people went mad over fans, lacquers, carved ivory, and tea-pots, none of which they understood, though Japan and China considerably worked down to the bad taste of the higher civilisation.

Collecting is a kind of gentle madness ;

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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it is an *idée fixe* without any fatal result, unless one collector kills another. It has, however, the singular effect that you lose interest in everything else. Go to a new town, and you make a bee-line for the antique shops. Your soul demands "curios," as the native of India his haschish.

I cannot help thinking how surprised the good people, dead and buried these hundreds of years, would be could they come back and learn what amazing prices we pay for their old trumpery. Are our belongings destined to be so precious? One can't imagine it; and yet many of them are so much nicer looking than those venerable relics on our shelves, that are so carefully ticketed.

That collectors are often hard up gives an added touch of piquancy to the joy of collecting. Some years ago, a young American painter was in Cologne, prowling about. Now he is quite the fashion, and his trouser pockets bulge with spare cash. In those days they hung flabby. He had an expert eye for pictures, and occasionally he had a windfall. Fate took him to an ancient

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patrician Cologne house, which the whirligig of time had turned into a rag-shop. From top to bottom it was stuffed full of the refuse of ancient garrets. His soul ached when he saw the splendid carved oak stairs, down which many a lovely foot had tripped, quite given over to the festive worm. The walls of one great room were covered by a most nauseating collection of old masters. He looked them idly over as he strolled along, and suddenly he stopped as if he had been shot. He asked the price of half a dozen pictures before he asked the price of a very dirty portrait.

That, the worthy shopkeeper explained, who had followed at his heels, was a real Velasquez, and the price in German money about a hundred dollars. Now, the point is that the painter man was ready to stake his life on its being a real Velasquez, but he no more could scrape together a hundred dollars than a hundred thousand. He had no money and no credit, and he saw amid all this worthless rubbish a priceless gem. He cursed his fate, pawned his old gold watch, and took the next train back to Paris, where he was studying. All his friends

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were, like himself, impecunious, though sympathetic, and, just as he was on the very verge of despair, he met a countryman of his who was a traveller in the millinery line, and, though he had once scoffed at millinery, it came nobly to his aid, and he made a bee-line back to Cologne. So great was his excitement that he cabbed it to the rag-shop and flew up to the picture-room, the shopkeeper again at his heels. He stared wildly about.

“Where is the Velasquez?” he cried, and his lips trembled so that he could hardly stammer out the words.

“Oh, we sold that the very day you saw it!”

The painter has often tried to describe his feelings, but always found language totally inadequate. The Velasquez now hangs in the Louvre.

Collecting will always have its little romances. I know of a modest one that occurred as recently as the sale at Christie's of the effects of the late Sir Henry Irving. Some one I know rather well had been to see the collection before the sale, and examined it by aid of the catalogue. He

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## THE CRAZE FOR COLLECTING

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came across a portrait with which he was familiar, because he has a very vivid memory ; he had seen it thirty years before. On consulting his catalogue he discovered to his amazement that the portrait was described as that of an unknown gentleman, and, further, that the artist was also unknown. Now he knew that it was the portrait of a famous actor by a famous English painter. He longed to buy it, but decided that it would go at too high a price, as both the subject and the artist would, he felt sure, be recognised.

He went to the auction with very little hope. The Whistler and the Sargent were sold, and innumerable other works of art, and then it was the turn of this picture. Nobody recognised it ! An unknown portrait by an unknown painter aroused no interest, in spite of its being a fine piece of work. Finally he had to start the bidding himself, and this he did very modestly. Only one man bid against him in a faint-hearted way, going up by a few shillings ; but he soon stopped discouraged, and then the picture was knocked down to the man who had never expected to get it. He

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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hurried directly to the desk to pay the small amount, and to carry off his prize.

“Do you happen to know anything about that portrait?” the auctioneer asked him as a porter took it down to a cab.

“I know it very well,” said the new owner, conscious that it was now safely his property. “It is a portrait of Buckstone, the actor, by Daniel Maclise. There is an engraving of it in the Maclise Portrait Gallery.”

And so there is ; and there wasn't one in all that crowd—some of whom must have known Buckstone well—who had recognised the picture of the most popular actor in the London of his day.

I only know of one instance where a collector really got much more than he wanted. It was last summer, and he was in a train between Stirling and Glasgow, when a woman with a huge basket climbed into his carriage. She was an exceedingly talkative person, and in fifteen minutes she had given him detailed particulars of her entire biography, including the number of her children (thirteen), how many had died, how many were alive, and why her

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## THE CRAZE FOR COLLECTING

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husband had recently run away from her. She further explained that she was a pedlar, and that she went from house to house buying, selling, and exchanging. These magic words were to the collector like trumpet tones to a war-horse.

His present joy is collecting old pewter. Did she ever come across old pewter? he asked breathlessly. That morning she had sold an old pewter tankard for next to nothing, it seems. Urged on to describe it, it so harmonised with a certain famous period of old pewter that the collector nearly tore his hair in despair.

Seeing his anguish she deftly changed the subject to a pewter teapot which she possessed, and out of which she and her fatherless children still drank their tea. The woman was something of a poet, and by the time the train approached Glasgow the collector was roused to such a pitch of eagerness to see this precious teapot, that he implored her to let him have a sight of it, and he would buy it if it was what she described.

She was a sprightly, business person, keenly alive to the pleasure of a modest

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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speculation. Her destination was Glasgow, but the collector was going on farther. The train was due to stop there an hour, and in that time the woman had to take a two-mile tram drive to collect the teapot and bring it back. She was ready to chance it. If she had luck she would be back ten minutes before the train started. She tore off with the basket, and the collector watched for her return with his soul on fire.

It is curious how punctual trains are when you don't want them to be! The time arrived and they locked him in. He hung out of the window and implored the guard to delay a minute. And just when he thought all was lost the teapot came tearing down the platform. It was thrust into his arms, and the guard gave the signal.

"Great Scott!" the collector groaned, "it is only Britannia metal. I say, here are five shillings for your trouble, will that do?"

The train began to move. She clutched the money gratefully, as she ran beside the train. "Thank you so much, sir, I call that quite fair."

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## THE CRAZE FOR COLLECTING

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Then the train settled into a fast trot, the collector sank into his corner and stared gloomily at the teapot, a hideous, bulgy thing, with the broken cover tied on by a shoe-string. He did the thing up in a newspaper so as not to see it, and he made up his mind not to show it to his wife. For two days he was haunted by that old teapot. He tried to lose it, but couldn't.

Finally, when he reached home, he showed it to his long-suffering wife, for he always did what he said he wouldn't. She looked at it critically and decided that she would have it repaired, and it would do for the servants. She felt that it possessed a charmed life, so it was eminently suitable for the kitchen. Next day she took it to a sympathetic old soul who takes dents out of silver and does other odd jobs.

"A Britannia teapot, you say, ma'am," he remarked, as he examined it carefully, "why, it is solid silver." And so it is; and though the collector has advertised piteously for the owner in the Glasgow papers the enterprising mother of the thirteen children has never turned up. However, this is a rare instance in the way of col-

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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lecting. It is usually the other way about.

But, after all, collecting is only half the joy of collecting! What an empty delight it would be if after untold trials, tribulations, vexations, disappointments, and final triumph, it simply ended there! Of course, the principal object *is* to gain the coveted treasure, but the next great delight is to decide on what to do with it, and where to put it. The rapture of finding a temporary resting-place for it—I say temporary advisedly, for when did a collector ever place his treasure permanently in any one place? It is the supreme joy of collecting to carry the precious thing from room to room; to try its appearance first on one shelf and then on another; on one wall and then another. To study anxiously if it agrees with neighbouring treasures. To dust it with pathetic care; to have a fit of nervous apprehension when an alien hand comes too near, and to be filled with uncontrollable ecstasy when a brother collector gloats over it in disappointed envy.

No, it is impossible for a collector to die

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## THE CRAZE FOR COLLECTING

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of a broken heart. He has thousands of interests. Now the trouble with the average person is that as he grows older his interests cease to be interesting, and become simply grinding. If people would only realise the value of collecting as a safeguard against the monotony of existence !

Still, like all passions, collecting should be kept under. As a safety-valve it is priceless, as a boiler it may prove destructive. One of its worst features is that it tends to encourage mendacity in all its branches. It is acknowledged that horse-dealing is not conducive to a strict and transparent honesty. The same may be sorrowfully said of those various trades whose business it is to sell to the inexperienced what they do not understand. On the other hand, it must be confessed that the inexperienced never have any conscientious scruples in taking in, if possible, the confiding tradesman.

I am inclined to consider collecting as a minor vice, and even a minor vice is not reprehensible—in moderation. It is a panacea against the dramatic emotions. Get madly interested in any one thing,

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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even if it is only collecting buttons, and you are armed against heartaches of every description, and even against a tendency to put an end to yourself. You simply can't! You haven't time!

It is idleness which is responsible for half the tragedies of life. The antidote to idleness is—collect.

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## The Trials of the Celebrated

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**I**GNORANT people talk of the cruelty of the Inquisition with its secret chambers where they asked unpleasant questions, but it was really a gentle and well-meaning institution compared to those enterprising companies that get up "Encyclopædias" and "Who's Who's" and other tortures, and send round unfeeling people who ask how old you are. Of course you don't mind if you are dead. Nor do you generally mind if you happen to be a man, for then you belong to a sex that can be bald and yet be beloved.

I don't suppose any one can realise the colossal superiority that gives to men! What woman, no matter how exalted her intellect, when deprived of her wealth of tresses, until the melancholy remains are the size of a farthing bun, would have the courage to confront the cold scrutiny of

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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the world without some gem of the hair-dresser's art with which to cover her loss? It is a minor argument which again triumphantly proves the superiority of man! A man simply wraps himself in his intellect and is irresistible; but one finds from melancholy experience that a lady only adorned with her intellect is by no means irresistible.

If she were we should have, instead of the bewitching young persons of our variety theatres, a *corps-de-ballet* of worthy matrons, who would lecture the enthralled audience on "How to keep house on nothing a year" and "The Blight of Beetles" and kindred subjects. That our variety theatres have so far not altered their methods of entertaining the public, proves that the intellectual woman is still not in it.

Imagine the justifiable rage of the *corps-de-ballet* if some officious encyclopædia should demand the biographies of its fascinating members and persist in requiring their exact ages? How the tulle angels would revolt! It's quite a different thing to sit before the footlights and merely

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## TRIALS OF THE CELEBRATED

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to suspect that the gyrating sylphs have been younger and lighter, then to go home, turn up their biographies in the encyclopædia and so pin them down to a definite age. It does take away some of the innocent romance of the "Babes in the Wood" if one is positively informed that they are grandparents!

Anthologies, "Who's Who's," and all the rest of those cruel busybodies in print, are the enemies to all illusion, and illusion is to a woman what the perfume is to a flower. Think of studying the ladies of the ballet through a microscope! Is it not the blessed truth that a woman is only as old as she looks? If then, some hard-working *première ballerina* of sixty has the divine audacity to whirl herself across the stage with the grace of sixteen, why should an impersonal monster—possibly hard up and who only wants to compile a book—kill the dainty, gauzy thing with a cruel date?

If it is true of her, why should it not be true of other celebrated ladies? Whether they write or paint, or sing or fiddle, or even lecture, *au fond* they are all the same

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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—that is women—and they just hate to tell how old they are! Illusion is the stock-in-trade of all those lovely creatures who smile at us from the enchanting pages of the illustrated papers. How they smile! Yards of smile! What encyclopædia man has ever yet dared to ask *them* how old they are! I offer up an earnest plea for equal charity to every other celebrated lady.

It is a cruel price for her to pay for being celebrated, to have all sorts of unfeeling publications require her biography! And when she artfully passes over her birth, as being of no earthly consequence to anybody but herself, cruelly repeat the question in a cold blue pencil by return mail.

Infant phenomena have recklessly been known to give their age without a thought of the years to come. I know a famous fascinator of seventy who when she took the world by storm at eighteen rashly acknowledged in print how old she was. She has been persecuted by it ever since. Even if she modestly tries to divest herself of a few years, editors always find her out by turning up that first, fatal biography.

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## TRIALS OF THE CELEBRATED

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Literary ladies have an awfully hard time of it! Nobody considers their feelings. It is impossible for them to escape the biographers.

Last week I called on a very famous friend, a friend whose intellect reviewers describe as masculine, and I found her dissolved in tears. She sobbed an explanation. A female anthologist had just come to get her biography for a female anthology.

“She had no more feeling than a tin pan. I begged and implored her to make me only five years younger, but she said she couldn’t in justice to the well-known accuracy of her firm. I explained it wouldn’t make any difference to her firm and it would make a good deal of difference to me. But she only replied that was one of the trials of being celebrated,” and my friend buried her head in the sofa pillows. “And what will Harry say!” she sobbed as if she had no intellect at all, while I studied the anguish of the celebrated.

Now Harry is also very celebrated, and he couldn’t be in a hurry if he tried, and for twenty years he has been slowly in love with her intellect. But it seems that

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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spurred on by the phenomenal success of her last book he had so far forgotten himself as to propose. It was a memorable night and he talked of nothing but himself, and when he gave her a chance she talked of nothing but herself. Finally, to make this occasion particularly memorable and pleasant, he asked her how old she was. He had known her intimately for twenty years, but that he did not know. So being not only celebrated but a woman, she told a fib. That explained her anguish. These are the tragedies to which the celebrated are liable.

What a privilege it is to belong to a sex that doesn't mind how old it is! The mere moral elevation attained by always telling the strict truth is inestimable. No wonder that most of the saints are men! It is so easy for them! Commend me, rather, to a hard-working female saint; it takes a woman to realise what she must have gone through.

There is a form of torture not confined to the celebrated, which is common in England, and that is the genealogical tree. I am sure there wouldn't be a genealogical

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## TRIALS OF THE CELEBRATED

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tree in the world if women could help it. It is the pastime of stupid old fathers who like to potter about among their ancestors.

“What is the use of looking nice!” a charming friend of mine cried in despair, when to amuse a desirable man who was in love with her, her father produced the family record, and the desirable man couldn't help seeing how old the girl of his undeclared choice was. And she had been younger.

“Think of a mother's doing anything so idiotic,” she cried in an agony.

The genealogical tree is even becoming the despair of the American woman. One came to me the other day in a panic.

“An idiot somewhere in Kansas has written to know when I was born, and to tell me that I belong to his family, and that he has been able to trace it back to his grandfather, who was a plumber. He says he is starting a genealogical tree. My goodness,” and she raced across the room in a flight of frenzy, “if we American women are obliged to tell our ages, that'll be the end

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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of us. There will be no charming Americans after that! It's bad enough to have the family Bible to contradict one, but the genealogical tree will be too dreadful for words, for that's always framed. No woman ever ought to be obliged to tell her age except the day she is born, and then it should be forgotten right away!"

Really, the principal characteristic of the twentieth century is its devouring curiosity. Everybody wants to know everything about everything and everybody. Illusions are not permitted, for as soon as we have an illusion we are deprived of it by those cruel publications which serve us with cold facts and statistics. Gone is the roseate mist through which we once gazed at life. Such as there is still left meagrely envelopes the ladies of the variety theatre, and that only because no one knows their age.

Abolish a woman's birthday, and see how young she will remain! It isn't life that makes her feel old, but the perpetual contemplation of those heavily-marked mile-stones she has passed along the way. When she can count forty, she suddenly

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## TRIALS OF THE CELEBRATED

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feels that she is tired. But it is only imagination.

If the ladies who demand the vote will make it their aim to exterminate those inconsiderate works of reference that insist on telling the birthdays of defenceless women, how every woman would support them! And if they should succeed in making it a penal offence to ask a woman how old she is, what a lovely world it would become, filled with happy women who never grew old! For it is one of the trials of the celebrated that they are not allowed to pretend.

I wonder who edited the first "Who's Who"? It must have been the serpent in the Garden of Eden!

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## The Poetry of Sound

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**I**F we have done nothing else of which to be proud, we can at least boast that we have discovered the commercial value of the poetry of sound, and that is more important than the North Pole.

It isn't of the slightest consequence what a thing is, as long as it has got a nice name. One is really surprised at Shakespeare. The idea of asking what's in a name! He wouldn't ask that now.

We live in a time when everybody has something to sell, and it is no use to wait for people to come and ask about it or one would have to wait for ever. It is necessary to pursue one's fellow men and roar its merits into their ears, and unless it sounds captivating they won't listen. Hiding one's light under a bushel has quite gone out of fashion; instead, the proper thing is to climb on the housetops and let it flare.

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## THE POETRY OF SOUND

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We have been reproached with not being poetical, but the trouble is we are painfully poetical, only our poetry has been directed into new channels. As we are the first who have discovered the commercial value of the poetry of sound, the result is that we welter in poetry from morning to night. There is hardly a tradesman who doesn't become lyric before the day is over. Our grocer and our greengrocer ransack the world to minister to the poetry of his customers. He offers them sweet potatoes from Africa, Grape Fruit from the Bahama Islands, sweet corn from America, olives from Spain, tea from China, apples from Tasmania and coffee from Java. Our butcher supplies us with lamb from New Zealand and beef from the vast prairies of America, to the great grief and discouragement of our home lambs and oxen, who will soon have to go out of business. But the consequence is that we have developed a perfect genius for description. Not always in poetry trammelled by rhyme, but the poetry of prose. And such prose!

It must be that our poets finding nowadays but little outlet for inspiration,

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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and realising the stern laws of supply and demand, have resigned themselves to devoting their genius to the advertising columns of our daily press. Or how explain the haunting melody with which we are told what to get and where to get it? The pathetic sympathy and the note of eloquent warning with which ailments are described to fit our symptoms, even before we realised that we had any symptoms! The epic solemnity with which we are told of the life-saving pill and where to buy it.

One does wonder what genius first discovered the commercial value of the sacred name of "Mother"? Who would suspect that behind that dear name there lurks an unfeeling corporation to whom the afflicted bring fabulous dividends? The poetry of sound! For, possibly, without that venerated name "Mother's" home remedy might prove a dead failure. Do we not, in our mind's eye, see "Mother" preparing that precious draught in a saucepan on the hob under a chintz frill, with an overhead row of willow pattern plates? The newspaper "Mother" always wears a frilled cap and she has spectacles on the end of her

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## THE POETRY OF SOUND

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benevolent nose. The newspapers have borrowed her with her frilled cap and spectacles from the past, for the new mother won't do at all ; she suffers from perennial and unsympathetic youth, and she simply won't grow old. It is not too much to say that the genius who first realised the commercial value of " Mother " was indeed the Napoleon of advertising.

As one studies those inspired names that look down upon us from the tops of buses one wonders who invented them ? What poet is responsible for that heavenly combination " Grape-Nuts " ? How tenderly the unknown genius, by aid of two little words, bears us away to a sunny Italian landscape, there, with music and dance and squirrels, to lead the simple life. Listen to the poetry of " fruit salts " ! It brings to one's mind overflowing baskets of luscious peaches and plums and grapes, out of which some celestial cook brews nectar and ambrosia.

Then again there is that other inspired instance : Nestlé's milk. The poetry of it ! One would dearly like to know if the name was the result of that celebrated milk

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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business, or if the milk business was the outcome of that alluring name? But in imagination one sees a nest of little birds swinging in a treetop and stretching open their hungry beaks to the eager mother bird. What can be more poetical?

Then who has not seen "Quaker Oats" surmounted by a benignant face that seems to throw in a blessing with each package? Further, has not the poet immortalised a certain kind of flour as "Snowflake," and bestowed on a popular brand of bacon the title "Flower of the Forest"? Why Flower of the Forest? Ask the poet.

Have we not the "Rising Sun Stove Polish"? Surely only a great poet could bestow on so unpromising an article as stove polish so poetic a name. Who does not know the water of that delicious spring called "Hunyadi Janos"? Now Hunyadi Janos was a famous Hungarian hero, and his people, to his everlasting renown, have bestowed his glorious name on the familiar life-saving blue bottles. The innate poetry of it!

Our everyday life is permeated by poetry. Take our laundries, for instance, a subject

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## THE POETRY OF SOUND

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which, it would seem, hardly lends itself to poetry, and yet see how in them the poetry that burns in every British breast seeks expression. One must conclude that the poets in the present depressed state of the poetry market, also employ their genius in naming laundries, or how account for their beautiful and arresting names ?

To christen them the poets have selected the most lovely names in nature. They have laid under contribution flowers, birds, seasons and stars, besides the Virtues, Graces and Muses, as well as the names of poets and composers, and even certain select historical characters. So it was my privilege to encounter the Julius Cæsar laundry cart in Pimlico, and the Beethoven laundry van on the outskirts of Clapham. In Edinburgh I was once contemplating the illustrious Sir Walter Scott in his neat little temple on Princes Street, when there rattled past us the Holyrood laundry cart. Shades of this great man ! What would he have said to the singular use of that historic name ?

If we may be permitted a criticism, it is that this important industry is perhaps

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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suffering from too much poetry, indeed one would like to urge in behalf of the long-suffering householder that the laundry poet be requested to curb his inspiration. One comes across an old, sailcloth-covered cart, oozing laundry baskets behind and drawn by a depressed-looking horse with its head between its legs, and showing more than its share of ribs, and driven by a gentleman who has never patronised his own business, and one reads on both sailcloth sides in fat black letters :

### **“BUTTERCUP AND DAISY LAUNDRY.”**

Captivated by the poetry of sound one's thoughts fly to spreading fields of golden buttercups and daisies, we see lowing herds, cottages embowered in roses, and the summer sun bleaching the snow-white linen spread on the warm, fragrant grass. It isn't like that at all, and we know it isn't. But blind to the evidence of our senses we ask the dingy driver for a price list, and the poetry of sound has found another victim.

It is all the poets' fault. Probably to save themselves from the ranks of the un-

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## THE POETRY OF SOUND

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employed they have inundated our daily life with melody. One can't escape although one sometimes wishes one could. Indeed there are times when one would be humbly grateful if our poets would return to their proper occupation of writing epics, and if they would leave our laundries, our mineral waters, our jams and our liver pills untouched by the deceptive glamour of their genius.

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## The Toast-master

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**I**T must be so awfully monotonous to be above party! Fortunately this particular monotony is exclusively confined to Divine Providence, Royalty, and the toast-master.

One night I went to a banquet in honour of so great a reformer that he wears a soft black silk tie—the kind that flutters—with his evening clothes. After we had eaten and drunk much more than was good for us, it was proved with the aid of champagne that without our reformer the country was bound to go to the dogs. Encouraged by the toast-master we hip, hip hurrahed our acquiescence, and sang “For he’s a jolly good fellow” in that independent key which proves more than anything else that Britons were never born to be slaves.

The next week, by a fatal coincidence, I went to a banquet in honour of a famous anti-reformer who wore a “made” tie. What was my stunned surprise to find

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## THE TOAST-MASTER

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myself eating it under the auspices of the same eminent toast-master who brooded over the banquet with the same genial duplicity. He again proclaimed "Silence!" with the same stentorian voice of conviction, as if his soul was in the message of the anti-reformer. Now it couldn't be if he was at all consistent? Again we sang "For he's a jolly good fellow," on the way to that tumultuous climax when all loyal Britons sing "God Save the King," which we all did except an independent old gentleman next to me who would persist in singing "Old Hundredth." We reached "grace" in such a state of exhaustion that we had no voice left, so we delegated our expression of gratitude to four disinterested persons who had had nothing to eat. I realise now that a toast-master cannot be consistent.

There is no one the English love so much as they do a policeman. They adore being told what to do, and this is the reason foreign nations come to us to study our successful methods of controlling the traffic. And for this same reason a toast-master is so successful a national institution.

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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He is, I say it respectfully, partly the policeman and partly the guardian angel of our banquets. And just to digress, I should like to know why one is obliged to eat and drink for the success of a worthy Cause. It is certainly the exception if we pray for it! To be a great patriot these days requires a great digestion. Once we persecuted reformers to death; in these days we kill them gently by the aid of turtle soup.

The toast-master is always a majestic being with a sonorous enunciation tinged with reproach. That he has no sense of humour is his salvation, for if he had he couldn't survive. Nor has he any earthly interest in any banquet. How could he? Imagine if he were melted to tears every night of his life? Or if he were nightly convulsed by the wit so delightfully characteristic of the British banquet? Why, he'd die!

A man I know who yearns to represent his country in that classic building on the Thames where they dispense both laws and afternoon tea, confessed to me that as a preparation to addressing and swaying

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## THE TOAST-MASTER

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those great men who sometimes take naps for the good of their country in its legislative halls, he had hired an ex-toast-master on whom to try his young eloquence. Twice a week the ex-toast-master comes, at half a crown an hour, and lets the floods of eloquence pour over him. The first time he demanded a brandy and soda at once, but as he fell asleep and slept through a perfect hurricane of eloquence, he now gets his B. and S. at the end. The man has a soaring ambition, and that is to bring a tear to the eye of the ex-toast-master, or to convulse him with his wit. That accomplished, he will not be afraid to address even those haughty and empty benches. So far, he informed me gloomily, he had not yet succeeded.

In studying the toast-master one realises that he is greater than the greatest. The noble chairman defers to him, and the committee, decorated with rosettes and perpetually bowing, come to him for advice. With what an air he proclaims "Silence!" Even if some bold, mad spirit ventures on a hollow laugh, most of us obey, for are we not Englishmen?

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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Who can ever forget the cast-iron melody of his tones as he proclaims : “ Silence for Sir John Jones, Bart., LL.D., V.O., J.P., B.A.A. ! ” Think of the intellect required to master these detached samples of the English alphabet. If anything could take away the last vestige of self-control of Sir John Jones, Bart., etc., etc., it must be hearing the stolid enumeration of his honours, while his legs are getting entangled at the knees, and he has temporarily mislaid his voice. The crystal tones come to an end, and there stands Sir John Jones, Bart., etc., very wobbly, deserted by God and man, and such few ideas as in happier days he once possessed.

While the guests are wedged in so tight that it takes the genius of a Phidias to carve even the tenderest drumstick, the toast-master stands untrammelled and free as air over all. He is so unmoved by the passing of the dishes that he is either a super-man or he has eaten before. One hopes he has eaten before. That explains his solemn indifference as, under his guidance we rise and listen to that electric grace which proves at once our

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## THE TOAST-MASTER

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gratitude and our famished condition. By devious ways we follow him to that final and still longer grace which comes just before the cigars; as if cigars were not included in our gratitude. Now I think grace should come after the cigars and before the speeches. Certainly before the speeches.

How sick to death a toast-master must get of eloquence! Even references to "our sainted mother in the dear old homestead" must leave him unconvinced. The jokes and the pathos were old before he was born, and his hair is hoary white. No wonder that his professional enthusiasm is tinged with melancholy! Supposing that, like the historic worm, he turns and takes to literature in an access of misanthropy, and writes "A nonsense book of Eloquence"! Wouldn't it be dreadful?

Has no historian ever noticed the striking family resemblance between after-dinner eloquence and hotel cooking? Possibly they flavour each other because they always go together!

One can imagine with what awful *ennui* the toast-master must see the perpetual

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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procession of the same old dishes in company of the same old smells ! With what a cynical smile he must watch the familiar old dress coat whispering fond nothings to the same bare shoulders. How he must ache when "our distinguished guest" gets on his trembling legs and makes that spontaneous speech of which he holds the typewritten reminder in his clammy hand !

The familiar process of a banquet ! You sit down and unfold your table napkin, and your eyes go on an oblique exploring expedition to your neighbour's name card. The chances are that you are sitting next to your mortal enemy. It can't be helped, and in its proper time you and he join peacefully in that glorious song which the British sing day and night, and on which the sun never sets. If your neighbour is a stranger, then you have to go in search of his mind, and dinner, somehow, is not a favourable moment in which to discover a mind. Now, if people were only labelled, and had an abridged biography neatly ticketed underneath, what a mercy it would be ! In five minutes you would be as far advanced as in a whole evening of soul to

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soul communion in the old way. On studying the coat-lapel of the old gentleman next to you, who is roaring out "God save the King" in a frightful dissonance, you would see written, "Prof. Bumper, Egyptian Explorer. Only interested in himself. Loves port." The convenience of it! Society has still much to learn.

The toast-master is the only living being who sees the human mind *en deshabille*. He alone can judge dispassionately of that oratory which possibly sways us through the exhilarating medium of *entrées* and champagne. In that glorious time when Society is labelled, there is another improvement I would modestly venture to suggest, and that is a coat-tail puller. I see as in a vision an electrical apparatus in the dim future, attached to the chair of the orator, and warranted to bring the most obtuse, by an ever-increasing pull, to a realising sense of the flight of time. The fact is it is not so difficult to make an orator speak as to make him stop. There is really no one so impervious to even indelicate hints as your after-dinner speaker. He is oblivious to the reproachful glances of the toast-master,

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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as well as the chairman's frantic cough. Unheeded is the conversation that grows brazenly bold while the exhausted audience rattle their plates as if they were tambourines. We all know him ; he is at every banquet, satisfied with himself, and deluded and encouraged into a firm belief in his own eloquence because of the frantic burst of joy that greets the end.

But the after-dinner orator who is beyond the pale of forgiveness is the one who produces a fat MS. out of his coat-tails ! There is always the hope that the extemporaneous orator may get so entangled in the meshes of his own eloquence that he will come to a premature end. But when the man with the MS. gets up, then leave hope behind.

I wonder if the toast-master has a private life ? Does he ever by chance wear anything else than those perfectly fitting evening clothes and those immaculate white cotton gloves ? I like to think of him as hieing to some sylvan retreat where, far away from *entrées* and eloquence, stale champagne and music, he can have peace. I must pause to ask why music at a banquet

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## THE TOAST-MASTER

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is always so mournful an art, redolent of cigars and the memory of departed dishes? Why is it always so melancholy? Why, also, on these festive occasions, do the lady reciters invariably choose those weepy tit-bits of literature calculated to stir the deepest emotions behind the most capacious waistcoat? Why, indeed! But, then, life is full of problems.

No lot in this imperfect existence is perfect; but there is one unique privilege the toast-master alone enjoys, and nobody else, not even his Majesty the King. He can circulate in the most exalted society and command silence. Think of it! He can advance through the most exclusive circles and with hand outstretched, gloved in spotless cotton, he can demand silence.

“Silence!” he proclaims, and even the haughtiest noble in the land obeys, and, in the words of a great American poet, “Silence like a poultice falls,” and the chattering, shrieking, giggling, ogling crowd is still.

There have been great magicians who in their day possessed the power to confer beauty, wealth, and even eternal youth,

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yet which of them is so great as he who in this electric age can bestow on us the merciful gift of silence ?

O blessed silence ! The joy to have that divine power, say, at the opera or at an afternoon tea !

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## The Gutter Sphinx

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**O**NE wonders if the sandwichmen are the perambulating satirists of London or its prophets? Perhaps they are a bit of both.

They announce either behind or before, and sometimes over their heads, that there is hope for the searcher after things, and like the prophets of old they are relegated to the gutter, instead of to that exalted position which should be theirs either as prophets or satirists.

However, whether as satirists or prophets they are above everything philosophers, and the greatest of philosophers, for they rise superior to clothes. They are the only public characters who, if I may be allowed so to express myself, don't care a d——n if it rains cats or dogs. Now to reach such a moral elevation is to be superior to kings, because kings, there is no doubt, suffer agonies from their clothes.

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For it is a part of the royal business to put on different clothes all day long as a compliment to superior visitors. And as visitors are always coming, the work in respect of clothes is correspondingly heavy.

Besides, kings suffer from too great affluence. A king would not dare to wear a suit of clothes long enough to make it mellow. If he invites a neighbouring king to tea he has straightway to put on the uniform of the neighbouring king's country, and one of his royal trials must be, one imagines, when just as he is kissing the neighbouring king on both cheeks—a salute quite devoid of savour—he possibly discovers that he has put on inadvertently the uniform of the other king's worst enemy. This is, of course, a suffering strictly confined to kings.

Nor does a king experience the joy of an old smoking jacket with comfortable holes just adapted for elbows ; nor can he know the satisfaction of having a patch in the seat of his royal trousers. It would be much more safe for him to commit a crime than to be seen by his faithful subjects wanting an important button, and there

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has never been a time when it was safe for a great king to be seen in his shirt sleeves. The mere idea savours of *lèse majesté*. And yet all these things and more a sandwichman can do, and the obvious moral is that it is happier to be a sandwichman than a king.

However, they have much in common. A king can confer benefits, and so can a sandwichman if the passer by will only heed the advice he wears behind and before. Furthermore a sandwichman has the advantage over the greatest king that he can trudge through the town in any kind of old boots, even odd ones as I have observed. Now no king, however powerful or gouty, would dare to do that.

One wonders if a sandwichman really appreciates the privilege of wearing old boots? Boots so old that they flop comfortably along; so roomy that the feet can spread themselves at ease and the toes enjoy the full freedom of the holes. Does the sandwichman appreciate a liberty denied to kings?

To study the sandwichman seriously one must go to Regent Street. He strolls there

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along the gutter singly or in single file and wears a kind of wooden waistcoat on which is a message of salvation to his fellow men. And if he is strong a supplementary board rises high on his shoulders, on which all sorts of lovely and famous beings ogle the passers by. Sometimes the great Spanish dancer, Senora Agrippina, smiles entrancingly at Regent Street over his old bowler hat with a broken-down rim. Sometimes he has the latest thing in musical artists, with a background of piano or trombone, languishing against his heart, or—most blamelessly—he is seen mounted by a fascinating lady in the latest things in corsets. Also, as he perambulates through the gutters of Regent Street, I have observed him bear aloft the likeness of an Oriental gentleman whose business, it appears, is to prophesy. And he announces himself as Ezekiel the Prophet who is prepared not only to tell fortunes from a shilling a head on, but also to give infallible advice for the same modest price and which may ultimately result in millions.

I wondered if he believed in Ezekiel the Prophet, whose calm Oriental countenance

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## THE GUTTER SPHINX

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and address he carried behind and before. It seemed so easy for him to consult that mysterious foreigner, and to find out what baleful combination of planets kept him in the gutter. I followed him the whole length of Regent Street, possessed by an irresistible desire to ask him why he didn't consult Ezekiel himself, and I had a shilling ready to give him in case he said it was because of a lack of funds. But I didn't dare. Besides, he was smoking a pipe and shuffling along, lost in day-dreams, with his hands folded under Ezekiel's advertisement. His boots were ragged, his trousers frayed, and there was a big hole for ventilation in his battered straw hat, but he smoked his pipe with an air of perfect content a king might have envied. Possibly he had learnt the great lesson that no man can be more than happy. I rather hoped he had, for I did not want anything to spoil his ineffable content.

Think of the tragedy of walking the gutter filled with vain yearnings after the unattainable, after the too fascinating Spaniard, Senora Agrippina, with very little bodice and great black-rimmed eyes,

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borne aloft on his patient shoulders. Or to have unfulfilled longings to hear the great piano man, or the genius on the trombone. The anguish of bearing abroad a fervid announcement of "sales", and never, never, to have a part in them. Or to study for ever on the back of a brother sandwichman the advertisement in which a truly benevolent emporium, actuated by the most unselfish of motives, announces a sale, to miss which would be nothing short of a calamity. Now supposing he had an unsatisfied longing for bargains! The agony of it!

For a moment he paused by the kerb while a proud motor was in two minds whether or not to run him down, and so I had a glimpse of a nondescript profile under the hat with the hole. It was the profile of a sphinx in reduced circumstances. It was as utterly impossible to discover in it either hope or despair as to see on a blank sheet of paper what will be written on it some day. A pipe hung from the loose corner of an unshaven mouth bristly with grey bristles. The nose was mongrel and red, blamelessly red, I was

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## THE GUTTER SPHINX

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certain, and such samples as I saw of a pale green eye floated in something watery. He shuffled along with his head bent forward, meditating, and puffing villainous tobacco.

Then I felt sure that he was a happy satirist—a cynic—who took no stock in Senora Agrippina of the black-rimmed eyes, who would not listen to the piano man or the trombone man if he were paid for it, nor had he probably ever heard of Ezekiel the Prophet, although he was no farther away than his own back and his own stomach. But what he did believe in was his pipe.

Just then my sandwichman met another sandwichman. His comrade bore aloft a flamboyant picture of a Turkish bath, and, as a sample of its luxury, he wore a fez as well as draperies of dirty Turkish towelling. Again I wondered if the Turkish towel man vainly longed for a Turkish bath? It seemed cruel that he should long for it in vain, but possibly he didn't long for it at all, and probably he didn't even know what a bath was. Perhaps he was a throw-back to the times of the great King Arthur,

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and Arthur also had never known what a bath was. For history has taught us that people did not wash themselves for the first thousand years of the Christian era. But let us not admire King Arthur or Queen Guinevere any the less for that! For we must beware of the dangerous tendency of our age to measure goodness and greatness by a soap and water standard.

I ceased to scoff at the Turkish towel sandwichman. He had had the luck to find the stump of a cigar, and, to enjoy this, he paused to borrow a light from my man's pipe, whereupon they parted as ships that pass in the night, and each shuffled on his way down his own familiar gutter.

It was a dry, sunny day, and the gutters were dry, and a pleasant, cool breeze circulated freely through the holes of my sandwichman's old boots. He wore a long-tailed frock-coat under his wooden waistcoat. It had probably once circulated at afternoon teas, and had possibly been made love in, or even been buttoned over a broken heart. At any rate, it had been constructed for a tall man, so its tails

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## THE GUTTER SPHINX

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flopped not far from the down-trodden heels. It had a big bulge in each of its two pockets, out of one of which the neck of a brown bottle peeped shyly, while from the other a hunk of bread, heavy with margarine, protruded from a sheltering newspaper.

It was one o'clock and the sauntering crowd on Regent Street began to melt away. The restaurants were in full blast, and alluring smells floated out of smart tea shops, and the air was perfumed with vanilla and chocolate, violet powder, and nectar and ambrosia. It was the time to eat if one had anything to eat.

Even my sandwichman paused in the middle of the gutter and meditated, whereupon he took a last puff at his pipe and then, still glowing, he placed it in his coat pocket over the shirt that wasn't there, and proceeded to pick his way across the road between cabs and motors and buses, through the street that leads to the dull, solemn square where William Pitt on his pedestal has the perpetual privilege of watching all the smart weddings at St. George's, Hanover Square.

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On one side of the Square is a gravel bin which seems to have been selected as the *rendezvous* of sandwichmen. Here they free themselves from the cares of business by simply standing them against the rails. Then, squatting down with the iron fence as a support to their backs, they produce their dinners usually done up in an old newspaper, although some sybarites soared to what had once been a bandana handkerchief.

One by one they all wandered in from the neighbouring streets: the man who carried Senora Agrippina the fascinator; one burdened by a celebrated musical conductor with his hair in his eyes and a perfect wealth of cuff. Also the man who announced the sale of the benevolent emporium which it was a calamity to miss. There was one very bald, ancient man who mopped his red skull with the remains of a dust cloth of a Stuart plaid, who freed himself from a lovely creature with cascades of hair, advertising the latest thing in hair restorers. The last man was very lame, and he was so short that he was quite lost behind a big advertisement of an infallible

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## THE GUTTER SPHINX

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corn remedy. As I lingered modestly behind the gravel bin, I discovered that they did not know each other at all, but, by some unwritten law of etiquette, each addressed the other by the name on his board.

I was glad to discover in them a touch of our common human nature, a base touch, possibly, but still very human, for as soon as they had liberated their patient backs from Senora Agrippina, the musical conductor with the cuffs, the young lady with the corsets, the Turkish bath, and Ezekiel the Prophet, they not only leaned them up against the railings, but they stood them all on their heads. Whereupon they fell to, and between huge bites of bread and margarine, each drank something mysterious out of a private bottle. Probably tea. Then some lighted their pipes, others entered into a minute examination of their feet, and the rest snored. But of one thing I am positive now, and that is, not one of them knew what his own particular little wooden waistcoat advertised.

A hand-organ, injudiciously stationed

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behind the gravel bin, ground out the *Intermezzo* from the *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and a little dog trotted past, paused, looked uncertainly over his shoulder and then came back again and sniffed inquiringly at the lovely countenance of Senora Agrippina standing on her head.

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## The Pleasure of Being in the Right

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**L**ONG ago parents used to have a kind of monopoly of being in the right. It was an article of faith in the nursery that a parent could never do wrong. It was a heavenly position! Parents were never told to get up at an unearthly hour, to brush their teeth, to wash their hands, to comb their hair. They always had the best of everything and not a word was said. Even when they said things that were not strictly true and were found out—which is, of course, the only sin—they were never thumped and sent to bed. But in this new era, though parents still enjoy some nominal privileges, they are undoubtedly subjected to a new criticism in the infant department.

A friend once told me of a heartrending experience of her own. Her dearest enemy

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came to call one day, and my friend's youngest, and artless thing of five, strayed into the room to entertain the guest until the arrival of her mother who, just as she opened the door, heard her remark in pleasant, conversational tones, "You're the lady papa thays he doethn't like." "You awful little story-teller," and the agonised mother pounced on her child and shook her, "how dare you tell such a naughty, wicked story! Go right to bed!" "He did!" and the wronged one burst into a flood of tears, "I heard him tell you, and you thaid you hoped she'd never come again. There!" Whereupon the infant martyr wailed herself out and left her suffering mother to explain.

Though the authority of parents has been distinctly shaken, they can still claim unreasonable immunity from punishment. When the family father spills soup over himself or the table-cloth, mother looks at him, but she says nothing. If a parent demands a second helping of tart, it is vouchsafed without unpleasant remarks. If mother breaks anything, the bits are discreetly removed, and, instead of "getting

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it," she is offered sympathy. Possibly she may say that she was careless, but nobody else would dare to, not even pa. It makes a young thing long to be a parent, if only to enjoy the blissful immunity from those consequences with which life is so packed.

The very young were at one time never in the right, even when they were in the right, for to have conceded it would have given the authority of parents such a black eye. But now young things make up for it! And, after all, say what you will, there is no other pleasure so great. It is the height of epicurean enjoyment. But these days it has so ceased to be a monopoly of parents, that one may truly say that the filial attitude is one of tolerant, if not impatient, criticism. The modern parent has resigned himself, as it were, to the spirit of the age, and has relinquished his old prerogative of being in the right, even if he wasn't, a prerogative painfully earned by length of days, experience and sorrow. And he even allows the young things, full of pathetic conceit, to give him the benefit of their callow wisdom. It is a sad satisfaction to reflect that the cock-sureness of youth will

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be knocked out of them as soon as they, too, become modern parents.

Some of us can still remember in the old days seeing an elderly woman stand trembling in the presence of a little old mother who laid down the law. Nowadays the power of old mother is curtailed, though not nearly so much as that of old father. In spite of holding the purse-strings, father never had the power to make one quake like old mother.

Yesterday I passed a small girl having a tussle with a small boy, whose ears she boxed viciously, at the same time shrieking at the top of a shrill voice, "I'll tell my ma on you, see if I don't," as if she could menace him with nothing more terrible. Indeed, as a mere threat father was never in it. On the whole, I rejoiced to see that the female parent had not suffered a total eclipse. But, unfortunately, this was in a slum neighbourhood and so doesn't count.

The present somewhat ignominious position of parents is due in no small measure to the American child. He has put them in their proper places with such great success that it has set the fashion for the

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whole world, with the exception of savage countries, where, one is pained to confess parents are still parents and still have something to say.

It is instructive to observe that always to be in the right gets to be a matter of habit, in which one can educate one's family to believe. All that is necessary is a first-class opinion of oneself and an irritating obstinacy. Every family is blessed with some member who makes up the minds of the rest. Most people love to have their minds made up for them, and there is always one in a family ready to undertake that little job. It is curious to observe how flabby a mind that won't make itself up becomes with want of exercise. Elderly parents are much afflicted in this way, but as a good many have cheque-books instead of minds, that answers just as well.

How different is the attitude of parents towards their children and towards the public! I knew a very eminent critic who wielded an awful critical lash that made young literary aspirants writhe. But, in his meek and private capacity as a mere

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parent, he met a just retribution at the hands of a young daughter, who contradicted and snubbed him as only a child can contradict and snub a parent. And that in the presence of the same young poets, who used to venture in at tea-time, whom the afflicted father had damned the day before in the columns of that great review whose mission it is to crush the aspiring.

It can be truly affirmed that domestic life, which was once a pleasing parental despotism, is now a republic, and the family motto is, "I know just as much as you." Once to be in the right used to be a kind of royal prerogative, but even the divine right of kings has now been so curtailed that there is hardly enough left to line a  $7\frac{3}{4}$  royal crown. And years ago a king had enough to cover himself all over and heaps to spare for his poor relations. It adds to one's acute enjoyment of it that it is the only pleasure money cannot buy.

There have been two mistaken poets who made some valuable reflections on the pleasures of Hope and the pleasures of Memory. But it seems to me that Hope is

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a sadly uncertain quantity in the future, not unconnected with disappointment, while Memory as an asset for pleasure has always struck me unfavourably. It deals, it is needless to say, with the past, and the past has a way of being past.

No, the only joy worth mentioning is always to be in the right or to think you are, which amounts to the same thing. Every family has a member so gifted, and very trying she usually is! I say "she" advisedly, because experience teaches that the being so divinely endowed is usually feminine. Indeed, apart from kings, who are born with the remains of it, I know of no other masculine creatures so endowed except the prophets. The prophets always were in the right and they always said so, and that annoyed everybody so much that they usually ended as martyrs. Now though the family prophet is almost more annoying, she unfortunately never ends as a martyr. The family does that.

What was so particularly trying about the old prophets was that they always prophesied something disagreeable, so, on the whole, one is glad that they have gone

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out of fashion as public characters, family prophets being quite bad enough. Then, too, it always seemed to me as if the old prophets got much more credit than they deserved, because it is very easy to prophesy something unpleasant, for it is so sure to happen.

One can't help wishing that, for a change, a new race of prophets might arise, who would foretell all the nice things that are going to happen! How we should welcome a prophet who would proceed through Threadneedle and Lombard Streets and announce at the top of his voice that the Budget problem was destined to be solved to everybody's satisfaction, also that the Lords were about to start on the most gigantic and thorough housecleaning known to history, and that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was, in the generosity of his heart, about to abolish the income tax!

Or think of the rapture of Piccadilly if a venerable prophet were to pass through that famous thoroughfare and announce that in future no bald-headed man need despair, for a hair restorer was about to appear to whom no sufferer need appeal in vain.

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How the afflicted in clubs would rush to the windows and rejoice, for, lo! a prophet had arisen in Piccadilly who had come to tell them joyful tidings. What a happy life such an optimistic prophet would have! And no one would ever dream of making a martyr of him!

But the private family prophet is quite a different thing. Her motto is always, "I told you so," and very annoying it is. It puts her on a self-erected pedestal of wisdom which is most irritating. Nor is it fair to prophesy backwards, as she almost always does. For it really does not take so much inspiration to tell what has already happened as she seems to think! Indeed, to sit in peace and safety and tell of all the unpleasant things that are going to happen to some one else is in a way a pleasure, even if a melancholy one. So if the prophets were never very popular they were not without compensation. Estimable and kind though they always were, still they might have been somewhat disappointed if their prophecies had not come true. After all, human nature is human nature.

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Even the family prophet, usually an acidulated maiden aunt or an elder sister just beginning to ferment, is also human. But parents as prophets have long since been out of it. They gave it up when they gave up being in the right. The trouble is when parents venture to prophesy and it really happens—as it sometimes does—then they usually get nothing for their pains but a broken heart for themselves. For the modern child—even when grown up, not to say elderly—has been known to turn on a broken-hearted prophet and say, “It’s all your fault. Why did you let me?”

Sometimes when one sees a foolish, patient parent unmercifully snubbed by youth and inexperience, one wonders, seeing that there is a society for the protection of everything else in the world, if it isn’t about time to start a society for the protection of parents.

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## The Wrong Sex

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**T**HE other day I listened to a discussion, between two men, of an historical work. Finally, one of them said, as conclusive and unanswerable argument against its trustworthiness, biased judgment, and exaggerated praise, "In fact, it's a woman's book." And that settled it; and so far as those two men were concerned, that book was nicely and comfortably damned.

I sat, as it were, on the outskirts of their conversation and pondered on the disability of belonging to the wrong sex. My only comfort was that, after all; it is only a few years since it was first discovered that women had anything more than, so to speak, domestic brains, and the world has not yet recovered from a mixture of consternation and surprise.

The Aspasia's of a bygone age were received with natural suspicion, and even now

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they are not to every man's taste. Still, the world is advancing, and its attitude towards women's work is already one of tolerant condescension, as if it were produced by a precocious baby. However, that *is* an advance ; and it is really not so necessary for women to take themselves seriously—some of them listen with awe to the sound of their own voices—as it is important that they should make the world take them seriously. And the first step in this direction is a vigorous crusade against “ woman ” as an adjective. Woman's work, indeed ! Why have we not the right to be judged by the same standards as men if we enter the field and compete with them for the same object ? What difference does it make if we do come out at the bottom of the list ? At any rate, it is a satisfaction to be judged by the highest standard. It is much more satisfactory than to be at the top—judged by that measure of mediocrity which is considered good enough for women. Judge the work, and never mind the sex of the worker !

It is useless to deny that whenever we

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## THE WRONG SEX

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venture on the field sacred to men we are always judged by the woman's standard, and that is not a man's standard. We do acknowledge that as creators we have so rarely reached the highest excellence that the exceptions prove the rule; and it is possible that, with the exception of these few instances, we never may. Still, is it too presuming to ask that, in spite of that, we may be compared to men rather than to other women?

I suppose it is true that in literature, for example, we women are hampered by a lack of knowledge—the knowledge which comes from a wide experience of life, and not from reading—as well as the lack of a wide and clear survey. But that may be the result of brains not hitherto employed in the more strenuous problems of life rather than their inferior quality. For the first time in history, women seem now universally to have a chance, but it requires an unbiased judgment to decide if our intellects enable us to do men's work with the same success. But, naturally, it will not help our cause to damn it, among other things, with an adjective. We are still the

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wrong sex, and we suffer from the melancholy tendency of the world to belittle us with an "ess"; for example, we are referred to as "poetess" and "authoress." The only art in which we don't mind "ess" is the actor's, for the reason that in this we stand so pre-eminent and on a level with men, that there is no chance here of demolishing us with condescension. But those of us who make modest little efforts at literature ought really not to be crushed by an "ess." Let us, rather, pluck up courage and demand to be called author or poet, even if by these terms we invite that comparison with the great which will make us feel very small.

I always remember with a sense of violent rebellion a lecture delivered before a club of young women, by the late president of the greatest American University, on some subject connected with the education of women, and his discouraging comment on the standard of excellence required in women's colleges, and the inferior quality of their professors. He said that no man of the first rank would teach in a woman's college, nor would he advise a man of

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unusual ability to take such a position, as it would inevitably imperil the usefulness and success of his career. It was what might be called very "straight talk," and I realised with profound discouragement that I belonged to a sex which has, to say the least, such a debasing influence.

I remember, too, his dispassionate judgment of women's University education. Women, he said, go brilliantly up to a certain point, perhaps more brilliantly than the average men, for they are usually picked women, but then they stop, and the lagging men merrily overtake them and pass them, and triumphantly do the serious and notable work of the world. As if there is not plenty of work to be done in the world, some of which women can do as well as men—some, possibly, not as well. Whatever it is, though, let it be judged by one standard, and call it work and not woman's work!

Perhaps one of the greatest discoveries of the nineteenth century is that women have marketable brains. As it is so recent a discovery, we must be excused if we think rather highly of what they produce. Some-

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times we are afflicted with over-modesty ; but at other times, like a too-partial mother, we have a rather overweening pride in our offspring. Yet it is pardonable if occasionally a worthy hen cackles rather loudly about what proves to be, on examination, a very little egg. To be honest, it would be a very noisy world indeed if the men clamoured with the same vehemence as some women for the recognition of a good deal of rather inferior work. It must be acknowledged that we women do not belong to the humorous sex.

It is a painful comment on the inferior quality of our brains that the world appeals to them so often as women's brains. We are offered women's papers, and women's magazines, women's columns, corners, fire-sides, and hearths, and all the rest of those sacred and familiar nooks. And we are given advice strictly consecrated to us, while the questions we venture to ask of the newspapers are answered in the backwater of the Press, where the literature intended for us meanders about lovely female forms in the latest thing in frills. One ventures to ask, in all humility, why should any magazine

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or newspaper column be sacred to us? Do we have publications whose end and aim are only to appeal to men as men? Does that mighty organ—the Press—produce in its pages pictures of fascinating men in different thrilling toilettes?

I really don't know why in literature—call it “literature”—it is thought necessary to appeal to us as women. We don't have pictures painted only for us, nor music composed only for us! Why, then, trouble to produce a literature only for us? One thing is sure, and that is that women read all the papers that men read, but no one supposes for an instant that a man ever reads a paper which addresses itself especially to women.

It was with a feeling of genuine satisfaction—as if it were a just retribution—that I observed the dismal failure of an attempt some time ago to publish a daily paper intended for women. Its failure gave me real pleasure. For once we rebelled! We refused to have our news doled out to us in a dilution presumably adapted to our weak intellect. Steadily and modestly the paper referred to became masculine, and as

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it is a flamboyant success I suppose women do read it now that it is not primarily intended for them. To have the best results, work should only be compared to the best, and we need for emulation the inspiring rivalry of men.

One would like modestly to urge magazines, devoted to what one is really obliged to call the "wrong sex," not to appeal so obviously to their feeble minds. To say the least, it is so impolite. For one would like to reach that elevated intellectual plane where one could feel sure that the conundrums and puzzles artfully inserted in the pages of the daily papers are not intended for our private and rapturous consumption! One could wish, too, that the feminine questions in that sacred column devoted to the perplexed, to which an omniscient editor gives patient answers, could be made less prominent. Who has not followed the intricacies of that corner column, in which the dear, confiding thing demands to know if white alpaca will still be worn for ball-dresses, and what she can do to get rid of ants? And how can she make her young man—with whom she has been

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“walking out” for three years—propose? Vital questions like these should be asked with bated breath in the bosom of the family; they are too sacred for print.

But why are only women devoured by this artless curiosity? Why don't men ever ask questions? The only known instance where men have asked miscellaneous questions is when they have interviewed the Delphic oracle. The Delphic oracle was, probably, a kind of *Daily Mail* of classic times.

How glad a woman is when she can escape from her sex! How flattered she is when she is told that she writes or paints or plays like a man. How often she hides herself behind a man's name. What man, on the contrary, would not feel insulted to have his masculine work compared to a woman's? Does that not prove which standard is the highest and most universally accepted? Which means, the sooner we cease to differentiate in work the sooner will women do infinitely better. And many of us protest against a standard which women are creating for themselves and permitting the world to accept. My contention has

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naturally no reference to such work as only women do, nor to that in which they have asserted their equality with men ; but only to those arts, crafts, and professions where men are great and on which women are venturing. If the field is open to both alike there should be no judging of the work by the standard of sex.

Divest woman's work of its adjective and then judge it on its own merit, without any concession, and give us a chance to start fair, even if low down on the list. If nature has given us the capacity we shall get there sooner or later. It is so much more satisfactory to be honestly and vigorously damned than to be dishonestly and faint-heartedly praised.

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## Men's Wrongs

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**O**NE hears so much of women's rights that, because of a strong sense of justice, one would like to say a word or two about men's wrongs. And, on the whole, it is a comfort to know that they also, have their wrongs. Still, the wrongs from which they suffer are only pin-prick wrongs, and yet they do represent an extraordinary amount of concentrated anguish. Although a mere woman, I have always been very thankful that I do not belong to a sex that cannot dust, make a bed or sew, as a right bestowed by nature.

A man who does any of these things only does so as a matter of wage-earning or the direst temporary necessity. Unlike a woman he cannot do these things and still be respected by Society. And yet to sew and dust, and to be able to make a bed free from lumps, confers on a human being so

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gifted a freedom compared to which the freedom of the greatest metropolis in the world is as nothing. For Fate may land one where it will be of no earthly use to be either a transcendent poet, painter, fiddler, statesman or general ; but there comes a crucial moment in every man's life when it is imperative that he should know how to sew on an important button. In life no one can escape the commonplace, although he may strive in vain to reach the divine.

In that tumultuous clamour for the rights they haven't got, women are apt to forget the rights to which they are born. A girl baby comes into the world, so to speak, needle in hand. Whatever the tragedies which are destined to be hers, the one tragedy she will always escape is waiting about with gnashing teeth, while, possibly, the fate of a nation hangs in the balance, until someone is found willing to sew on a button. And, speaking of buttons, there is probably nothing of its size so important in life. The want of one may in turn ignominiously vanquish the hero of a hundred battles. It's not his fault but his misfortune, to which, as a masculine thing, he is born.

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Nor can any woman understand the horror and melancholy of sitting helpless and hopeless in a disorderly room, grey and chilly with dust and neglect, and, because of the traditions of sex, to find it impossible to overcome the dust and straighten out the furniture. Nor is it possible for any woman to know the harrowing anguish of plunging into an unmade bed, still lumpy with the remains of the last night's sleep. One can't help feeling that women get more comfort out of their capable hands than men do out of their capable heads. But when the time comes that the capable hands will unite in one person with the capable heads, then, indeed, must men beware.

Of course when it comes to cooking, the most helpless and the most forlorn man can still the gnawing of hunger in a cook-shop. But when it comes to dusting, no man, were he the greatest intellect of his time, can dust a room, make his bed or do a little necessary sewing. And so long as the world judges by appearances, and it always judges by appearances, at a crucial moment even the want of a button may wreck a

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promising career. A woman who sews and dusts and makes her bed, only enjoys a privilege to which she is born, and for which she is not grateful. A man to do these things has indeed to be in dire straits, and the very fact that he does them—and always secretly, as if it were a disgrace,—shows that he has the soul of a hero. On the other hand, a man who puts a pin where a button should be, has reached next to the lowest depths of degradation; the lowest being, when he refuses to cling to respectability even by a pin. But a man sinks to that before a woman. A woman has no excuse to take refuge in a pin, no matter how low she has fallen.

The poor, male creature, although privileged to vote, has, no matter how great he is, to submit to the tyranny of that weak, down-trodden sex that darns his stockings, mends him up, keeps him tidy, and, in the course of those gentle ministrations, takes it out of him as only the weak can. The greatest man in the world is the helpless victim of tradition which, since that first historical garment that Eve, the universal mother, constructed in the Garden of Eden,

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has delegated the privilege of the needle to the female sex. One wonders by what right have women arrogated to themselves this proud privilege? Did the serpent advise it after that historic bite?

After all, it does show the innate modesty of men that they have not risen in their just indignation and demanded a right which is infinitely more important than to vote. What would the world be without the needle? No, it isn't the pen that is mightier than the sword, it is the needle. We could do very comfortably without swords, but the greatest historian of battles could not prove that the world is able to get on without needles. Why, then, should this inestimable privilege belong to one sex?

Why has, so far, no champion appeared to demand for men equal rights with women? If women want the vote, men should turn on them and demand, as a fair exchange, the liberty of the needle. Let them require for their boys at least rudimentary teaching in the domestic sciences, to give them a respectful name. Let them be taught to recognise dust when they see it,

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and, what is more important, to get rid of it. Teach them to respect a dust-pan and a broom. Teach them to make a bed, smooth, square and without lumps. Let them be taught to honour a needle as the visible sign of self-respect. Why should men be the slaves of women in those preliminaries of life, the knowledge of which leads to self-respect and decency ?

The time has passed when work equally well done by both sexes remains the right of one. Women have triumphantly competed with men ; now, for a change, let men compete with women and do openly and without shame what has, since the Garden of Eden, been the privilege of women.

A man may not always have enough money to marry on, but he can always afford a penny packet of needles. And how many a man takes a wife when he, really, only wants a needle ! One would like to urge men to revolt against this tyranny of women. To demand that those slender, sharp and mighty implements that have made their mothers so powerful, be put in the awkward paws of their boys. Then

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observe the inevitable change in the history of civilisation! The result would undoubtedly be a more charitable and a more kindly understanding between the sexes, a new sympathy, and that absolutely just balance of power which must be the result of universal freedom.

And as women would suffer less from nerves and broken hearts if they had less time in which to think of them, so men would be more contented, more respected and respectable if they were brought up to confront the empty space where a button had once been, with that indifference, born of the knowledge which is power.

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## The American and his Holiday

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**A** DISTINGUISHED American wit once said that all good Americans go to Paris when they die. That represented the acme of aspiration of the sixties and seventies. In those days we took in England by the way, and in passing did homage to Shakespeare, the Crystal Palace, Westminster Abbey, and Madame Tussaud's. We yawned our way through a British Sunday in those relentless lodging-houses of the Bloomsbury district, where the economical of our nation congregated. Even supposing we had it in our unregenerate hearts to demand to be entertained on Sundays, the British sense of propriety nipped that in the bud. We were not entertained, unless staring through tears of fatigue at vagrant cats prowling about the trees of Bloomsbury on a godless quest after sparrows, may be called being entertained.

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In those days we were given over to an orgy of church-going, and in a liberal way we patronised all creeds. We also went on Dickens pilgrimages, as no one else did. The London we adored was Dickens' London with a few churches and historical names thrown in, for even then London was fast becoming a city of reminiscences. Finally, having seen all the churches and all the imaginary haunts of the famous people who never existed, having eaten more vegetable-marrow—the national vegetable of England—than we wanted, as well as that other national asset, a heavy, bilious kind of plum-cake, we finally escaped from the British Sabbath, and fled to that gay city on the Seine, in whose deplorable vocabulary there is no such word as "home." There, instead, we became acquainted with that French national institution, the "café chantant," which made our respectable American souls thrill with the consciousness of seeing "life."

Since then the wheel of change has swung round ; Paris has sobered down and London has cheered up. Divine Providence is with the nation that has "home "

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in its vocabulary, and these summers the sun positively shines in London, and, encouraged by nature, London has annexed some of that gaiety on the Sabbath which the Continent is fast losing. To be sure, if we are a hungry and homeless wayfarer, it is still rather difficult to get anything to eat on Sundays in London, but we are permitted to listen to music, and certain picture-galleries are open to us. In fact, the Americans have taught the British the first rudiments of enjoyment. The new British gaiety is England's concession to her best transatlantic customer. Years ago it was only artistic heathens who were "at home" on Sundays, but now that everybody is at home on Sundays, the only wonder is they ever get any one to come to see them. However, the travelling American is always to be relied on, especially the feminine American, well-dressed, with the national figure, enthusiastic, keenly intelligent, and eager for information which is stuffed into that other national institution—her omnipresent bag. The truth is, if it had not been for Americans, Europe as a summer resort would never have been

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discovered. Next to its original discovery by Columbus that is the greatest. Why grumble over the engaging peculiarities of the American tariff, when America yearly exports that tremendous output of brave American citizens on whom, in a modest way, England also puts a little import duty? There is no question but that they pay their way, to the joy of others besides the English shopkeeper. Even those higher in the social scale get their little welcome pickings. I remember an astute American, after studying English methods, saying with bated breath, "An American has to be up very early to get ahead of an Englishman, and even then he's sure to find him there already." Yes, it is the American dollars that bulge British pockets, which have given the English their new gaiety!

To say in America that you are going abroad puts you at once on a superior social footing. It is a kind of self-bestowed order of knighthood without a title, but which gives you a keen sense of superiority. The American who goes abroad never returns exactly the same. His outlook has immeasurably broadened, and though he may

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believe more than ever in his national eagle he will find that there are other formidable heraldic birds and beasts on earth besides that great bird who spreads his wings across the national shield and occasionally favours the world with an ear-splitting shriek. It gives the patriotic American a wrong estimate of values if he only hears his own eagle scream, and it is necessary for him to hear the screams and roars of Europe. Hence the educational value of European travel.

The travelling Americans can be divided into the extravagant and the stingy; there is no medium. They either overpay their way, or they underpay their way. It is a mistake to think that the travelling American is always rich. He mostly has to count his pennies to make them meet. But it is this wrong estimate of Americans that is responsible for the increased cost of travelling. We are not all Vanderbilts! It is not the Vanderbilts nor the Rockefellers who help to circulate the American dollars abroad, but, rather, the shoals of modest students, teachers, tourists, and town and country folks who

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come over here to spend what they have saved up for this event of their lives. They say it is the steerage that pays on the ocean liners, and so it is the modest "comfortably off" who make the effete countries prosperous. The necessity of European travel for the American is amply testified by its ever-increasing tide, even in spite of the ever-increasing cost. But go he must, although it is at an expense which years ago would have appalled a rich man.

Americans who feel that "Urup" is banded against them, come across by way of Cook's Tours and other personally conducted parties, and pay a round sum for which they take part in a frenzied flight across the Continent, while Europe passes before their dazed sight like a kaleidoscope. Their time is limited to the summer, and as Europe is large, they have to "step lively." A kind of nightmare of travel begins, and they see the sights in a race against time. They shoot through picture-galleries, churches, public buildings, and past monuments; in fact, they are not spared a single one of all those free entertainments

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to which the personally conducted are liable, until exhausted nature gives out. Who has not strayed across worn-out American female tourists in hotel parlours, hollow-eyed, sallow, haggard of cheek, straight-fronted though exhausted, shirt-waisted, loathing sights, hating churches, hating pictures, and always with a bag under their arm? An American was overheard to ask a porter in a Geneva hotel, "Is there a museum in this town?" "No, sir," said the porter, humiliated by this disgraceful confession. "Thank God," the young American cried fervently, and shook the astonished man's hand.

The American, like his English cousin, is limited in his expressions of rapture. I remember a divine night in Venice. The Grand Canal lay bathed in moonlight, and from a passing gondola, gay with lanterns, a song floated softly upwards. Suddenly, through the stillness of this city of Dreams, I heard a compatriot, a wide-awake, red-headed youth from Maine, exclaim with sincere conviction, "I say, a gondola does beat a buggy all hollow, don't it!"

The rapture with which the American

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goes to Europe is only equalled by the rapture with which he returns home. Europe is a hard nut to crack even in three months. It is only as he finds himself gradually recovering on his homeward journey from a physical and mental collapse, the result of a chaotic multitude of impressions on a perfectly exhausted brain, that he begins to enjoy himself in retrospection. But he would enjoy himself more did there not loom before him the prospect of that fateful interview with the keeper of the national conscience, the custom-house inspector. Who of us has been able to look into the inspector's suspicious eye without quailing? No woman, of that I am sure! Men are much more scrupulous as minor criminals. A dear friend of mine smuggled a silver tea-service under her petticoats, where a teapot, the milk jug, and a sugar basin thumped her most cruelly. She had bought them in Paris, where a guileless "antique dealer" swore by all the gods—and offered to give it to her in writing—that this particular service had been the private property of Louis XVI. Having escaped

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the argus-eyed but guileless inspectors, whose wistful orbs she had disdained to blind even with a five-dollar bill, and at the cost of a few bruises, she reached home with that sense of satisfaction which a woman always feels when she has smuggled successfully. She divested herself of the private property of Louis XVI, took a few days to recover from her bruises, and then went on a shopping expedition just to prove to herself how cheap Europe really is. Fate took her, she told me afterwards, to a huge establishment built along the soaring fancy of a Whiteley, and just as she looked into the interior of what Americans call a "dumb salesman," and which far from an impropriety is merely the name of an electrically lighted glass-case, she stared aghast and petrified, for there in the "dumb salesman's" interior stood the exact copy of her own Louis XVI tea-set. She had imperilled her immortal soul to smuggle it over, but on inquiry, she found the price, which, of course, included the duty she had escaped, as well as a handsome profit, to be ten dollars less than she had paid for it in Paris. She said that it did seem odd

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of Louis XVI to have two tea-sets just alike, but she supposed he had forgotten.

“ However,” and my friend spoke as one registering a solemn vow, “ I’ll never buy anything in France again ! A country,” and words cannot do justice to her withering scorn, “ that doesn’t know the meaning of ‘ home.’ ”

Though I did not quite follow her reasoning, I was more than ever convinced of the wisdom of having a good conscience, and buying one’s Old Masters, Lowestoft china, Chippendale and old silver in America. Why not give the American workman a chance !

Though all Americans want to go to Europe, fortunately for the National Exchequer there are millions who can’t. The only class that doesn’t need or want a change in summer is the lowest class. It is change and refreshment enough for them to have the streets watered occasionally, whereupon they can bask luxuriously in the resulting steam, while they watch the closed ice-carts roll stolidly by, because the Trusts won’t sell ice except at famine prices, for even Trusts must live. And your

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sweltering householder and his white-faced children gasping hot air, a whole panting family hanging out of each dingy window, are not profitable customers. It would be rather pleasant to hope that some day the gentlemen of the ice trusts may realise the drawback of not having any ice. There are commercial crimes that make one regret a rational religion which is fast doing away with that particular form of future punishment in which the world wisely believed for so many centuries, and which is so simple and yet so effective.

Apart from these forlorn waifs and strays, every American tries by hook or by crook to get a little holiday in summer. The relentless climate makes it a sheer necessity. The only saving grace the cruel heat has, is that it is dry, and not damp like the English. In New England the cities pour themselves into the country and the sea-shore, while the West crowds to the sea-bound Eastern towns as to havens of bliss. The American summer sojourner of towns is for this reason quite a different kind from the native. By the blessed 4th of July, which American patriotism cele-

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brates in a manner calculated to be most destructive to life and property, whoever can afford it flees from town, and offers up a silent prayer that the ardent patriotism of the citizens who are left behind will not prove fatally destructive. For, without any exaggeration, what between fires, accidents, and deaths, the United States may be said to offer up every 4th of July, in the aggregate, a good-sized town and its inhabitants as a thank-offering for the many blessings only the free enjoy. Still, one can't pay too much for real liberty.

Of the people who desert the towns, some of the frivolous go to summer hotels—curious American products bereft of men but prolific of boys, little boys too youthful even to flirt with. Only at the week's end do the grown men arrive in trains, whereupon animation is restored to the lovely but deserted creatures who, dressed in the last "cry" of fashion, have to rock forsaken on the hotel piazzas throughout most of the week. On Saturday nights there is a kind of thanksgiving "hop," and such young feminine things as can't find a masculine creature to hop with, hop with

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each other. But it is sad to see two girls dance together—the real salt and savour of dancing quite disappears.

The truth is, the dancing man is fast vanishing from the face of the earth. The modern young man won't dance, and he hates summer hotels. So he growls and plunges his way into the primeval forests, and in his bungling fashion tries to escape the piazza girl, but he can't. For she plunges after him into the primeval forest, and for his sake she dares many things: gets spiders in her hair, earwigs down her back, and ants and grasshoppers up her spine. Still, the young man is destined to be captured whether on a hotel piazza or in the Adirondacks, for though ornamented with freckles and mosquito-bites, and with her nose peeling, the new six feet, fresh-air American girl is quite as dangerous as the five feet four inches kind in a ballroom. For you really never can tell.

The American man has a perfectly beautiful reputation as a husband. To such an extent, indeed, that when future generations demand the description of a

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martyr, then will the biography of the American husband be produced as a sample of what a real martyr is. His reputation as a martyr rests on his willingness to let his wife go away without him, while he, in company with the family cat, guards his home, and without the cat, earns his daily cake, for the necessities of life are not so essential to the American as the luxuries. He is also cited as sweltering in town while his dearest rocks on hotel piazzas, and arduously constructs those bits of needlework whose destiny is dust. His claim to domestic martyrdom has not only resulted in a universal disparagement of the foreign brand of husbands, but in a doubt, occasionally expressed, as to whether he really exists. At any rate, an Englishwoman was heard to remark, "I wonder if American women really have any husbands?"

Far be it from any one to disparage the American husband, for he is good and dutiful, and well-trained. All one ventures to question is whether he is such a real, out-and-out martyr as foreigners have been led to believe? Does the American hus-

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band really dislike to consort with the family cat? Is it a fearful sacrifice for him to have the sole run of the house? Must it not be a real solace for him to put his feet on the Ormolu table, or on the drawing-room chairs, or his hat on the bust of Clytie—it always is the bust of Clytie!—in the bay-window? Are there not ameliorations to his martyrdom? Does he not take this opportunity to invite to his deserted home his most undesirable bachelor friends, and refresh them with those sacred drinks for which the American husband is so justly celebrated?

Is it an awful agony to stay at the Club until hours whose smallness would cause comment if indulged in at other times? As for going to Europe, what American husband would not much rather pay untold bills than trot behind the insatiable partner of his joys through those awful picture-galleries, not one of which is spared him? With what concentrated regret many an American husband, lured across the water and tugging after his charming tyrant in a toque, thinks of that happy, deserted family cat, licking its face,

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or toying with a mouse, or sleeping the sleep of the unbothered just! Or of those dear friends having a "gin-cocktail" at the Club in peace, while he works like a slave seeing things he doesn't want to see! Far be it from any one to disparage American husbands, only in the cause of justice and fair-play they really should not be made out to be martyrs of the very first class, because they are left at home. Martyrs of the third class one might call them, with an occasional day off.

In America, apart from the piazza rockers, hotel hoppers, and the select who retire into Newport palaces, country houses, bungalows, and the primeval forests, as well as the elect who go abroad, there is a tremendous, serious-minded contingent whose object in life is to improve their minds, and they always take the summer in which to do it. Now a nation which makes of learning a summer entertainment, of that much may be expected. The more unsophisticated Americans are nothing if not conscientious. The less they know of the world, the more seriously they are inclined to take their own minds; especially

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the New Englanders. England has no idea what good stock she lost when she lost her New Englanders.

To be perfectly just the American never does anything by halves, though he probably does things in too much of a hurry. So in summer there is a feverish demand for instruction by what, in default of other description, we must call the middle classes. As a national asset, these are of vastly more importance than the multi-millionaires. The American middle classes are in the throes of a tremendous educational movement of incalculable importance, as it is absolutely voluntary, serious and sincere. A movement that has produced among others that extraordinary system of which "Chautauqua" is the most familiar. Thousands of men, women, and even children, come to this New York village, from which the system takes its name, every summer to receive instruction. It is amazing to study the curriculum of a day's lectures at Chautauqua, and to watch the eager thousands ready to undertake this mental toil for the sake of learning. It is study for study's sake. What in its modest way can

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be more ennobling? And in what other country in the world could such a spontaneous and serious effort be possible except in America? As a factor in the future greatness of the country, one is inclined to think that this is overlooked when, in the discouragement of recent revelations, the world is tempted to apply the adjective "decadent" to the youngest and possibly the greatest of the nations.

When all other schools and universities are closed, except such as have University extension lectures to offer, then the summer schools open their rather shabby portals to an eager multitude who long to be taught with a longing that partakes of the solemnity of a religious rite. And there is no doubt that the summer school, voluntarily attended, has a tremendous and far-reaching influence among those who form the backbone of the nation.

Perhaps the Americans are given over to too much of an orgy of information. Perhaps they do try to inform themselves with too much of a frantic and unhumorous haste. It is also possible that with a greater sense of humour they might

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know more, while they learned less. But a sense of humour is not always safe nor desirable for the eager aspirant. It sometimes acts as an icy douche to young ideals. Life is probably made easier by a dash of humour, but it is never an ingredient in great national movements. Martyrs, pioneers, discoverers, and other epoch-making human beings, are not usually gifted with much humour. It is therefore a fine, unhumorous stock that takes its learning by way of summer amusement, and the information so acquired by the first generation will probably reappear as wisdom in the second. The only time when one deplores the wisdom of this electric system is when summer empties into the cities its hordes of conscientious and eager teachers, who flock there to give their tired brains an extra polish, instead of letting them lie fallow. But every great movement has its martyrs.

Here is another American expedient in this longing to get an education. Many young girls and young men—with the perfect republican right to be called ladies and gentlemen—do what can only be

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## AMERICAN AND HIS HOLIDAY

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described as menial service in summer to earn enough money to pay for their schooling in winter. I myself have come across two head-waiters in summer hotels who were trying to earn enough money to study for the ministry. In another summer hotel, quite a large proportion of the waitresses were earning money to become school teachers, or to go to commercial schools. I remember a young man who saved the wages he earned during his holidays by being a tram-car conductor, to pay his way through the University in winter. Much can be expected of a nation which is made of such stuff!

The endeavour of Cecil Rhodes to transplant young foreigners into England is probably not that they should study the wisdom of books, but, rather, that they should become acquainted with that other important branch of education, the knowledge of men. So that the barrier of ignorance shall for ever, even if slowly, fall between the great nations, as it is bound to do if their young men in their impressionable youth are brought together. One cannot but wonder when men shake their heads

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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and question the wisdom of the Rhodes scheme. Cecil Rhodes was the only great modern epic poet, and he, instead of putting his aspirations for his country into verse, turned them into a splendid and generous deed, with an imagination worthy of an inarticulate Milton.

It must be confessed that there is something very engaging in the way the American encourages the most heterodox creeds. He is surprised at no man's religion; no established church has the power to make one sinner more fashionable before God than any other. That is a mercy! Because of this singular independence of belief, and the impossibility of becoming a social martyr because of belonging to an unfashionable sect—such as Dissenters in England—therefore all religions over there flourish merrily side by side. New England, apart from Utah, where the Mormons still prosper though curbed as to their matrimonial proclivities, is the fruitful ground for all creeds, new and old. Boston, famous for many a great philosopher, boasts of a magnificent Spiritualistic temple, whose Egyptian style of

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architecture declines to harmonise with the architecture of the rest of the neighbourhood. It was built by a faithful and inspired grocer. As for the Christian Science churches, they flourish like the green bay tree. Here this great modern cult had its beginning, and from here ten thousand pilgrims went to Concord, N.H., to do homage to the late Mrs. Eddy, who, a realistic newspaper reporter informed us at the time, received her faithful in a purple velvet dress, and wearing a purple velvet bonnet. We in Boston also sat at the feet of Eastern pundits in " parlors," and the only time we rebelled was when our prophet from the East—that he was a prophet was evident from the cut of his brown frock-coat—with downcast eyes and profound learning which few of us understood, was found to be—it leaked out at an unregenerate masculine Club—a young German whose father manufactured velvet in the Fatherland. That was a little too much for us! So we ceased to sit at his feet.

After that we revelled in theosophy. We had a real theosophist over from India,

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and for a whole season he took the place of teas and musicales, and other frivolous amusements. There was no mistaking him, for he had Eastern legs, as well as Eastern eyes. We understood that he was a martyr for the sake of his religion. Men at the Club scoffed at him, but they couldn't say he wasn't Oriental! Finally he and his crinkly hair, and his Oriental eyes and his Oriental legs, vanished, and years after we heard that he had settled in Bombay, and that he had given up martyrdom—at least of that kind—and had married, and that there were now eight little martyrs, also probably with Oriental eyes and Oriental legs.

A small and select group of us also investigated spiritualism, and saw uncanny sights, and were pelted with mysterious flowers, and I remember a guitar floating in black space that hit an unbeliever on the head with a spite that was distinctly earthly. The only trouble with this ardent hospitality to all forms of belief was that we got so dreadfully tired of them in no time. And so, after this digression, one comes back naturally to one of the

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## AMERICAN AND HIS HOLIDAY

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most curious of summer gatherings I ever saw, and that was a spiritualistic camp-meeting.

The tendency of birds of a feather is to flock together. Hence in America those queer summer gatherings where besides education one can pursue the cheerful creeds which, like Methodism, flourish in the open air. If the conscientious American is not improving his mind, he loves to improve his soul, and he loves to do it in a crowd. This spiritualistic camp-meeting, of which I speak, stood on the sloping pine-clad shores of a little New England lake. It consisted of shabby, gimcrack, two-roomed cottages, built between aromatic pine trees, and along straggling woodland paths soft with pine needles. The domestic arrangements were much in evidence, and the name and spiritualistic speciality of each occupier were set forth on a modest placard fastened to the shabby front door. And sometimes one caught sight of the occupier, when not in a trance, in black broad-cloth and with long hair, helping strange, sallow ladies with short hair in their simple housekeeping duties,

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and both had that curious detached look characteristic of ardent spiritualists.

Séances were the order of the day, and one could choose one's favourite brand of manifestation by studying the placard first, as one would the dishes in a modest eating-house. Slate-writing, trance mediums, materialisation mediums, and those that foretold the future, or, most unnecessarily, retold the past, all were at the service of the wayfarer at any price, from twenty-five cents up. Here believers and unbelievers trod on each other's heels in their frantic desire to penetrate into the yonder. A thoughtful woman once said to me, "If we could be sure of the happy future we are promised, we would all commit suicide ; so it is the greatest proof of divine wisdom that we don't know." As for unbelievers, they were as common as the other kind, for your true unbeliever is quite prepared to believe anything—no matter how foolish. So there was a positive rush and crush to commune with the tired spirits of the dead. This spiritualistic camp-meeting flourished for years in this out-at-elbow, uncanny village, in-

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habited only during summer by hundreds of miscellaneous human beings collected together for converse with the departed, and stamped with the unmistakable stamp of those who meddle with the unseen. In the autumn they scattered like ghosts at midnight.

It was such a beautiful, dingy spot, and in its midst stood a rickety spiritualistic temple, while, over all, there was a generally unkempt appearance, as if the presiding elders had too much to do to devote their attention to picking up the banana and orange-peels, peanut and egg-shells, empty gingerbeer bottles, and an occasional celluloid collar, of the pilgrims to the Infinite.

The American people's motto of life is unquestionably "Get your money's worth, and don't waste time," and it permeates their pleasure as well as their toil. They make a pleasure of business, and that is the reason they are so shrewd and so successful. On the other hand, it retaliates on them by creating those countless men who beyond their business have no resource whatever in life.

The serious danger to the American is

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that he loves his business too much ; if he does not die in harness, he often enough is confronted by a dreary old age, utterly devoid of interest. If one were permitted to give a word of advice to the American man, it would be, "Learn to enjoy something besides your business." If, on the other hand, one were to offer advice to the American woman, it would be, "Do not work so hard for your pleasure." While to the nation at large one would venture to say, "It sometimes pays to waste money, while a judicious waste of time has, in the long run, proved to be a valuable investment."

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## London-by-the-Sea

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**T**HERE are two inscrutable smiles in the world, one of which has perplexed the critics since Mona Lisa first looked out on it from the immortal canvas of Leonardo. The other, which has probably never perplexed anybody but myself, is the smile of George IV on his granite pedestal in Brighton. I never saw a more life-like and more engaging stone smile ! I have seen heroic, dramatic, and tragic statues ; statues of ladies dissolved in tears, statues of gentlemen about to kill themselves or (what is always wiser) some one else, but I have never before seen one that was so intensely polite and affable. If ever a statue did the honours of a place, that is the statue. It stands with a courteous, outstretched right hand, and welcomes the tripper to that brilliant, bustling town which is affectionately called "London-by-the-Sea,"

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and, at the same time, it points in the direction of the best hotels. With a background of trees and a foreground of motor-buses, King George looks cheerfully and contentedly across the Brighton at his feet, the creation of his poetic fancy. And the inscrutable and polite smile, by an odd accident, is turned towards that modest house in which once lived and loved Mrs. Fitzherbert, Queen Maria Fitzherbert of England as she undoubtedly was. It is said that George had a light-hearted way of getting illegally married to any number of ladies, but that the only one who could put any trust in her marriage lines was the lady at whose house his statue will continue to smile as long as that well-mannered bronze holds together.

Strict morality will rejoice to know that the abode of Queen Maria Fitzherbert has been turned from the impropriety of its ways, and that it is now the house of the Young Men's Christian Association. Instead of old and young bucks and beaux with skin-tight trousers, blue coats, gorgeous waistcoats, big shirt ruffles, enormous stocks that all but choked them into an

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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apoplexy, and white beaver hats with a curly brim, it is now over-run by young men in that enchanting costume so characteristic of our age, "knickers" and Norfolk jacket, the belt, of course, dangling. An added charm is a woollen cap, which, in moments of relaxation, is worn with its peak behind. Sometimes, also, two iron bracelets about their trouser legs proclaim them to be not amateur convicts but strenuous cyclists. It is a change not without a comical aspect, and that is probably the reason why this polite statue can hardly conceal a smile.

It has always seemed a waste of immortal power that the greatest master of satire of his age should have turned his thunderbolts on the smiling gentleman on his pedestal. It was using a sledge-hammer to crush a nice, fat caterpillar—the big, lazy, fluffy, black and yellow kind. The black and yellow crawling fluff is not without a certain kind of beauty, but in spite of that, after all, the inside is only a worm. Why waste such sledge-hammer satire on a worm!

Brighton—which one loves—is the in-

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carnation of a smile ; a charming, sunny, surface smile—a reflection in brick and mortar of that smile on the pedestal. It is the creation of an essentially unimagina-tive imagination, and it has besides been the victim of an architect afflicted with nightmare and who turned his nightmare into stucco. Why a kind of imitation Moorish architecture carried out in stucco should have been planted on British soil, George and goodness only know !

That awful Pavilion which he created and in which he rioted, has now the shabby, worn-out appearance of an old, impecunious rake who drinks gin in place of the cham-pagne of his youth. That awful Pavilion with its countless little onion domes, its gimcrack ornamentation done in painted wood, and with the usual tendency of stucco to look damp on the slightest provocation ! It exhales mildew and mustiness in spite of its neat lawns and careful flower-beds. It is difficult to imagine the curricles and coaches of that day dashing through the false Moorish gateway with heavy swells throned aloft all modelled on that big, fat, royal gentleman. Like the house of

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Queen Maria Fitzherbert, the Pavilion has also been turned from the error of its ways, and entertainments of a strictly sober and respectable kind probably convulse the wicked old echoes.

The Pavilion is the only effort at architecture in Brighton. There is, to be sure, a little sprouting of imitation onions on one of the piers, but it is only a feeble, obsequious imitation, and the rest of the town is laughter done in bricks and mortar. The kernel of Brighton is George smiling on his pedestal on the Old Steine, with a garden in front of him and another behind him, and a pleasant, shady road at his feet, through which motor-buses and other noisy traffic shoot up and down the hilly streets gay with shops. From George innumerable streets radiate in every direction, full of boarding-houses, hotels, and lodging-houses, all invitingly open, ready to receive the tripper or the week-ender with open arms. It is Brighton's business to succour the homeless, and it can be truly said that George is the patron saint of lodging-house keepers. What would they do without him? If he would turn his

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smile a little to the left, past the Royal York Hotel, across the garden, he would get a glimpse of the sea. And there is no sea like the Brighton sea, and there is no air like that exhilarating tonic which sweeps across the Channel and over the downs. There is no sunshine in all England like that great gold sun which sinks into a glory of red and gold behind the fretwork of the two long, slender piers which stretch out into the sea.

Apart from the broad promenade along the water-front, the streets of Brighton, until they cross the border line of the more modern, more fashionable, and far less beautiful adjoining town of Hove, are queer, narrow, winding streets, of the early days of last century, flanked by odd little houses with bow windows and tiny rooms. Or they are tall, formal structures, suggestive of bygone fashion, through which a hurricane follows one with a lash of icy air. Nature contributes to Brighton the downs, the cliffs, and the sea ; the rest is furnished by man. George was the high priest of the artificial, and he has set his seal on his own creation. If he were only here to enjoy

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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the full-blown rose of which he planted the seed !

Brighton is the city of electric lights. At night it looks for all the world like a huge, glittering nosegay. How George, whose wickedness was only illuminated by tallow candles, would have revelled in it ! How he would have rejoiced in those huge caravanserais built on the water-front, in comparison with which the Pavilion, the materialised dream of his wicked, stodgy life, would have seemed to him very cheap and tawdry. How he would have enjoyed the human beings who crowd the gay hotels, and who stroll up and down the water-front all day long in very gorgeous clothes. It is indeed the haven of rest where ladies with straw-coloured hair and rice powder on the end of their noses, love to commune with Nature. Poor George, to think what he missed ! One sees, too, gentlemen about who would have roused his ardent sympathy—gentlemen smoking big cigars and wearing big checks. It may be a digression, but what is the reason why big checks and a bad record always seem to go together ? Villains always wear big checks, but a good

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hero never could wear them and remain either good or heroic.

One is always so sorry for people who live in Brighton, for they can't go there to spend a week-end. For, say what you will, the familiar, no matter how fascinating, soon loses its fascination. It is not the ordinary householder who appreciates the charms of Brighton, and who, in intervals of paying his heavy rates and taxes, looks to that divine sunset and thinks poems even if he does not write them. No, it takes the week-ender to do that! Who can rhapsodise over the divine beauty of sun, sea, and cliffs that are only a part of the stock-in-trade and are let along with the lodgings! The wayfarer, light of heart and trustful, usually appears in a fly piled high with luggage and, possibly, family. He drives from house to house reconnoitring lodgings and landladies. It is the beauty of the arrangement that neither knows the other, but they accept each other on faith, which shows the innate goodness of the human heart. Finally, the light-hearted wayfarer in the fly is taken in, possibly in one sense, if not in another.

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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It is the proud claim of George that he left Brighton a haven of rest to the homeless who can pay.

There never was such a town of comedy as Brighton ! Up and down its hilly streets, which were once wind-swept downs, and which are now rows and rows of brilliant shops, a perpetual crowd is always surging past. Tea-rooms entice the thirsty tripper, or he wanders into those alluring little shops where, in a kind of madness, he buys those awful *souvenirs* which are brought back to the sufferers at home. Politeness is the keynote of Brighton ; Manners on a Monument has set the pace. Even the motor-buses that shoot up and down the narrow, hilly streets are polite. The influence of that affable smile is felt in the courteous way in which those vehicles come to a full stop before one climbs in, while the polite conductor, possibly a lineal descendant of that great and smiling gentleman in the Old Steine, puts his forefinger in the small of your back as the machine starts and you stagger forward. There are times when good manners are much more important than a good character.

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

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How quickly one becomes a part of Brighton! After that first wild flight in a fly, and after one has clinched a bargain with a lady whose non-committal face is like the Sphinx's, only much more so, one puts on a cap that cannot be blown off, and joins that tireless procession on the water-front, and in fifteen minutes one feels like one of the oldest inhabitants of Brighton. In fact, one stares in turn coldly and scornfully at other flies laden with harassed families also in search of lodgings. Or one sits on a bench and contemplates the sea, or one reviews the various pleasures Brighton has to offer: goats harnessed to little go-carts, donkeys patiently leaning against the side-walk, Bath-chair men wistfully trying to catch one's averted eye. Cabs with discouraged horses, that are given up to a contemplation of their own legs, are anchored to the side-walk, and public motors, offering delightful excursions at low rates, with the danger thrown in, all lie in wait for the ardent tripper.

Noisy motors full of hideous apparitions tear along the Madeira shelter under the cliffs of Kemptown, and a noisy little elec-

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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tric train which runs along the very water edge on slender trestlework rising out of the sea, takes one with panting haste from the middle of Brighton along Kemptown—the loveliest and most health-giving part of Brighton—to the snow-white cliffs of Rottingdean. And, after a tumultuous journey of ten minutes, the noisy little train on its brave little trestlework, pauses out of breath just where the “Happy Family” stands outside the bit of a station.

One can't avoid the “Happy Family,” and, indeed, one does not want to. Its members live in a cage of some pretensions, for it has two stories, and it is under the auspices of an elderly gentleman with a weather-beaten face who gives one a detailed biographical sketch of his charges. Indeed, he sold me, for the modest sum of one penny, a poem of his own construction inspired by them, and he pointed out with great pride the printed announcement over the façade of the cage, “Patronised by Royalty.” “The Happy Family” immediately rose in my loyal estimation. One could wish they did not have to live in a cage, but, of course, that is the only way

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one can see how really happy they are ! I did not for a moment doubt that this meritorious family enjoyed Royal patronage.

“ His late Majesty did us the honour several times to inspect us,” said the elderly gentleman solemnly. I could well believe it ; it was so like King Edward to go down the cliff with his grandchildren and make the personal acquaintance of these, the humblest of his subjects. There was a fox with his intimate friend, a game cock, roosting on his back. A Manx kitten washing its face in the immediate neighbourhood of two nervous little mice, and three red-eyed ferrets, in pale golden furs, were quite chummy with two white rats. A couple of owls on a perch blinked blindly at three very cocky-looking hawks. Of such and others did this happy family consist. One feels persuaded that his Majesty was not above patting the Manx kitten—so strenuous about its toilet—and that he vouchsafed a glance of sympathy at the little fox, whose destiny was one of ignoble safety.

The Brighton beach is covered with

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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samples of life. It is not what one might call a soft beach. It is strewn fathoms deep with sharp pebbles that follow the receding waves with a monotonous crunching cadence that lulls to sleep on a hot summer day. Unassorted humanity loves to sprawl about on the pebbles as if they were Nature's feather-bed, and—passing on the gay little train—one has a varied vision of the British citizen lying on his stomach and snoring in time to the rise and fall of the sea. Or young women outstretched on shawls, some playfully decorated with the hats of their gentlemen friends, or sleeping with an empty lunch basket for a pillow. As for the innumerable children, they fill the clear, warm air with their shrill cries, and with their short skirts or breeches rolled up high, paddle in the water with glistening, active legs, or dig in the sand with the eternal spade.

It was on this same beach that the immortal Mrs. Pipchin stood guard over little Paul Dombey under the lee of Dr. Blimber's celebrated Academy for Young Gentlemen, and, indeed, nowhere do boarding schools

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flourish as in Brighton. Perpetual processions of infants, two by two, buffeted by the wind and convoyed in rosy-cheeked couples, are walked along the sea front, arrayed either in pig-tails or broad collars, without which, it is instructive to note, no young thing can ever hope to approach the altar of learning.

High on the beach row-boats, pleasure-boats, and fishing smacks are drawn up, and dun-coloured fishing nets are spread over the pebbles or across the rails to dry. Fishermen sit yarning or netting on up-turned boats, while bathing machines on the edge of the water are waiting for custom. Along the slender groynes, that stretch out from the shore, countless seagulls perch, and eye with meditative curiosity the nobler race which cannot fly and whose paddling is a disgrace. They are so familiar with the presence of families with lunch baskets, they are so conscious that these lunch baskets are not unconnected with a light refreshment for gulls, that one can follow the absorbed interest with which they follow the destiny of a veal and ham pie. Even the scooting by of the busy

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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little train does not rouse them from their absorbed contemplation.

On Sundays, as a concession to the sacredness of the day, and, presumably, to the sinfulness of the floating population, the beach takes on a staid and virtuous appearance. The sailor men are stiff in Sunday clothes, and the dirty infants of Brighton (of whom there are many) are washed in honour of the day. And itinerant preachers dot the beach and collect about them rival factions of idle sinners, while strolling sinners hang languidly over the iron railing, and listen to the preachers who roar themselves hoarse, and seem on very hail-fellow-well-met terms indeed with Divine Providence. As I lingered one day on the outskirts, listening to an agitated brother dancing a *pas seul* in his righteous zeal, an irascible old gentleman turned on me with a splutter of indignation, "Don't listen to him, madam, he's the worst kind of scoundrel, and he is just out of jail for cheating."

On week days the secular drama is also represented on the beach. Groups of three or four wandering mimes, in fancy dress

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that looks shabby and faded in the daylight, with accompaniment of a cracked piano or mandoline that sets one's teeth on edge, sing those songs about "mother," or "father," "little sister" and "little brother" and "darling" which thrill the British heart. Or they deliver themselves of those sad comic songs, accompanied by comic dances, which for some unknown reason incline the British tripper to mirth. Reserved seats are a penny for two hours, the audience outside the rope making off before the hat is passed. In no place does one ever see such incongruous persons make use of music for a living as in Brighton. The latest was a well-set-up elderly gentleman with a grey military moustache, an overcoat and well-brushed top-hat and tightly rolled umbrella. In company of a ricketty upright piano on wheels, played by a very seedy individual in a cap, he sang the "Lost Chord" (that fatal song) in a cracked voice, but with great elegance, as if on his way to his club he had met this turnout and had then and there been impelled to burst into song. He was so superior, so dignified—like a

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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general in very reduced circumstances—that one did not wonder that he left the gathering of pennies to the man in the cap, while he himself strolled up and down the side-walk with magnificent dignity, as if he had no earthly connection with the establishment.

Then, too, there are little bands of masked songsters, ladies and gentlemen, disguised members, probably, of the higher nobility, who also wander through the narrow streets and along the sea front. Nor do they disdain the pennies which they cajole out of souls not unmoved by music, even when it is rather shrill and flat. To this one may add the Town Band, the piano-organ, the man who toots the “Miserere” out of *Il Trovatore* on the cornet, the hand-organ that grinds out the “Old Hundredth,” the blind harpist and the fiddler, mercifully blotted out by the traffic, and the old woman leading a blind man who roars “Hallelujah” with trumpet tones. These are only a few among the feasts of sound prepared for the sojourner in Brighton.

But the glory of Brighton is the sunset

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and the night. As the sun sets in a sea of red and gold, the long piers become indistinct and mysterious as they fade into the twilight; until suddenly their slender length and all their delicate tracery are outlined by myriads of electric lamps. Even the great caravanserais on the waterfront become, as it were, a part of some great, grim, shadowy castle on the cliffs, and for a moment of time this gay and frivolous City of the Sea rises against the night like a city of dreams. There is for an instant something tragic and solemn as it looms dim and gaunt against the sombre sky.

Goethe's ballad of the "King of Thule" always comes to my mind when I sit on the pier and watch Brighton fade into the twilight. That "King of Thule" who was faithful to the grave, and to whom his sweetheart when dying gave a cup of gold, out of which, henceforth, he drank at all his carousals, until his last hour came. Then, so goes the ballad, he divided his dominions and riches among his heirs, but the gold cup, dearest of all his treasures, he gave to none. But as he sat for the last

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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time in the banqueting hall among his knights, he drained out of it one last glowing draught, then, with his dying strength, he flung the golden cup into the sea and closed his eyes in death. A melancholy, light song with a few strummed minor chords as background.

At twilight one can just see the castle on the cliff, where the King dwelt who was faithful to the grave—not characteristic of the only other King connected with Brighton—but as it grows darker it vanishes into the night. Then, suddenly, all Brighton bursts into a blaze of electric light. From the flat long line of Hove in the hollow, beyond the huge, noisy, Americanised caravanserais on the waterfront, past the clock tower in the square with its countless twinkling lamps, past the old inns that once were famous, past the Old Steine and the New Steine, past Kemptown on the cliffs—supremely disdainful of the boisterous hotel life at its feet—and so to the snowy heights of Rottingdean. The long, upward curve of the coast is outlined by a chain of electric lamps, which from the far distance look

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like a river of diamonds clasping the shore, and from the edge of which a fringe of myriad tremulous golden threads lie on the sea.

In the town the narrow winding streets are ablaze with brilliant shops, and all Brighton is out of doors in that enchanting darkness which one can only see in a glitter of light. To think how Manners on a Monument would have loved it all; how he would have basked in that garish light! How he would have revelled in that light-hearted crowd, loitering and surging through the streets—staring into those inviting shops where imitation gems from a false Golconda tempt lingering ladies with yellow hair and rice-powder, dead tired, possibly, of communing with Nature. Yes, it is his creation—his inspiration—that great gentleman to whose good manners the sculptor was obliged to do justice. He was a King of Comedy, and he created the town of Comedy. Perhaps that is the reason he smiles that inscrutable smile.

Was there ever a tragedy in Brighton? Certainly not, unless it be the one recorded on a tablet in the Roman Catholic Chapel.

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## LONDON-BY-THE-SEA

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But even that was no tragedy, only a second-rate melodrama of a stodgy kind. No tragedy could survive the sordid vicinity of the man with the smile. I held in my hand a few of his gifts to her, poor, pseudo Queen, and I pondered on the economy of his offerings: a tiny ivory fan—a gold watch studded with seed pearls, a pair of inexpensive earrings, and a waist buckle of the same style of architecture as the Pavilion. He paid a great many of his debts with that immortal smile; still, to be just, he was very lavish on himself.

In the case in which these relics are kept there is also a little shawl, a scarf, an embroidered bag, a cologne bottle, and a variety of other sad odds and ends, that have escaped the discourteous flight of time. They are now in private possession, for it is interesting to note that Brighton declined to buy, even at a small outlay, these equivocal souvenirs of an improper if mistaken lady. But a gentleman is never improper, and so Brighton's gratitude to its benefactor found vent in this statue to his good manners, for other reason there certainly was none. Still, when one comes

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to think of it, heroes are so much more common than good manners !

So long may King George greet the Brighton trippers with that engaging and suave smile. Did not old William of Wykeham say ages ago :

“Manners makyth man.”

Why, then, for once, should there not be a monument to manners ?

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## The Camel at Home

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**T**O see the glory of the sunset at Biskra, the Gateway of the Desert, climb to the height of one of its wide, white roofs, and Biskra, in its oasis of waving palm trees, lies at your feet. Beyond, as far as the eye can see, the yellow sand stretches out to arid sand-dunes and, in turn, the sand-dunes melt on the horizon in those barren hills, whose sterile heights Nature, as if in a fit of remorse, inundates every evening with the most glorious colours of the sunset; for at sunset the Biskra hills fade softly into a mist of rose and gold and purple.

Winding among the sand-dunes caravans of camels plod stolidly in and out of the pathless desert, while flocks of sheep crowd along the dusty high road followed by shepherds in the garb of Bible times, and Nomads riding their sturdy asses

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just as they did in the days of the patriarchs, jog slowly along to their encampments. In the near distance, dazzling white against the sumptuous dark green foliage, is the arched entrance to that mysterious garden made famous as "The Garden of Allah."

The wide, dusty road that passes along the gay hotels with their length of snow-white arcades, leads to Old Biskra, with its mud houses nestling under spreading date palms that throw a grateful shade over a splashing roadside rivulet, which Biskra borrows a few hours every day to irrigate the sandy soil. The mud houses look like pictures out of an ancient Bible, and from the low, arched doorways the loveliest young faces follow the passer-by with shy, curious glances. But the loveliness fades all too soon, for age turns the women into hideous old hags with sunken features, toothless gums, the lobes of their ears shapeless and torn by the weight of their rude silver and coral ear-rings, and their once liquid black eyes faded, shrunken and sunken.

Indeed, if one may be permitted a

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## THE CAMEL AT HOME

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digression, it is that one gets so tired of the liquid black eyes that make the Orient monotonous. It is a positive relief to see a pair of nondescript green eyes, without much expression, under a cap with a peak that proclaims the Briton. One resents, too, the stately grace of the Arabs, and the classic folds of their *burnous*, remembering how most of the world's time, and all of its intellect, are wasted in a desperate effort to keep up with the fashions. Here are fashions as old as the hills and yet they are for ever new. Nor have modern improvements disturbed the unsanitary sanctity of their mud houses, and they still eat their dates with the same abstemious content.

In Biskra the only instance of the modern spirit of enterprise is the way in which the Arab guides harass the unwary tripper, whom they seem to consider their legitimate prey, Allah sent. The best way to escape from their friendly persecutions is to succumb to the most persistent, who then constitutes himself one's protector against all the rest. They are a handsome, stalwart race in their white

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garments, and they have adapted from the West an Arab variety of swelled-head, that consists of a genial, captivating impudence which, when draped in white and accentuated by the usual liquid black eye, is especially irresistible to the American and British female tourist.

The open hand of Fatma, the favourite daughter of Mohammed, is the Arab talisman, bringer of good fortune; and it appears and reappears in all Moorish ornaments, from rude brass jewellery to architecture. It has even gripped the souls of the people, for the national attitude is always with an open hand. But, indeed, the beggars in Biskra, at least the very young beggars, are most charming. For never were there more lovely children, with their beseeching liquid eyes, their half-humorous, half-pathetic smile, and their little dirty, outstretched hands. Even their rags reveal with unconscious grace the beauty of their slender limbs. But, alas, as they grow older and more persistent, and ripe, as it were, in impudence, dirt and bodily infirmities, which are their most valuable assets, they become the terror of the tripper.

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When one sees the veiled Arab women one must acknowledge the wisdom of Mohammed the Prophet. Mohammed the astute was not at all inclined to make women the equal of men, but in his way he did what was perhaps equally important, he tried to make them equal one to the other. Hence he bestowed on them the veil, to be worn as soon as they should reach the marriageable age. And it is instructive to observe how soon the merest mites cover their little faces with a bit of white rag, which hides their mouth and nose but leaves fair play to those big, black eyes which, as I have said before, make the East so monotonous.

Only in this one instance has the subtle prophet given the advantage to the female creature, for she has to be taken on trust; as the ardent bridegroom never sees his bride until after the marriage ceremony. The veil in the East constitutes the true republic behind which all charms, or want of charms, are equal. The tragedy of it must be when the bridegroom for the first time sees his bride. Which is, probably, the reason that Mohammed permits his

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faithful followers four wives apiece and, also, makes divorce easy. Still, it must be tiresome to go through life with one's face always covered in public. Mohammed should have set an age limit, after which, it might be understood, the ladies would be quite out of the running. But, being one of the wisest men of all times, Mohammed was probably aware that women cannot be conquered—even by time.

One Friday, in the Arab cemetery, a small native girl, with a touch of negro blood which gave her a flat nose and a sense of humour, explained the matrimonial situation to me. The cemetery was crowded by unveiled Moorish ladies in their great baggy trousers. For Friday is the one day of the week when they are permitted to meet unveiled among themselves in the cemetery. Here, laden with babies and luncheons, they have a pleasant, cheerful picnic beside the graves of their families. Many are handsome, willowy creatures, but most of them verge on old age—thirty—when the Oriental face takes on sharpness and the Oriental figure takes on fat.

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Foreign ladies strolled in amongst them as they sat munching around the untidy graves, and the two civilizations stared at each other suspiciously, and the Western civilization picked up its fastidious skirts. The West certainly has the best of it, for a Western grandmother, on whom the dentist and the hairdresser bestow immortal youth, is still good for many a flirtation. I recognized the subtle wisdom of Mohammed and his veil, but I rejoiced to belong to a civilization whose grandmothers can easily be mistaken for their granddaughters, instead of the other way about.

The little Arab girl with the flat nose and a sense of humour, rescued me from a crowd of very small and very dirty little beggars who clung to me on both sides in an effort to extract alms, until I took refuge behind a neighbouring tombstone. She gave me a running biography of herself in capital French, and informed me that she was a *femme de ménage*, and had been so for three years. She didn't wear a veil because she hadn't yet wanted to get married. Still, she was getting old—fourteen—and marriage is something everyone wants to

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try for himself. But Arab husbands are a lazy lot ; they never do any work, but they make their wives work. If they won't work, then they beat them ; if that doesn't answer, then they get a divorce.

“ But,” and she nodded her black head, “ I've been saving up my wages, and I can afford a good man. I think I shall begin to wear a veil by next week. Anyhow, even if he does get a divorce, he'll have to give me back my dowry. Do you like being married ? For you look married. And has he only one wife ? And doesn't he beat you ? ”

She stared at me with beseeching black eyes.

“ You wouldn't,” she urged coaxingly, “ you wouldn't like to take me to your country as a *femme de ménage* ? I'm superb at housework, and some day, perhaps, your husband will marry me. Tell him I've saved nearly nineteen francs.”

It is from Biskra that the dates go on their sticky, conquering way over the world, and in the Biskra market-place one sees them piled high in golden brown mounds, or still clinging to their slender

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branches, or in great compact masses packed in untidy goat-skins. Except in the morning, from eleven to one, when all Biskra, struck by silence, takes a siesta, the market hums with life and flies.

Only the twilight disperses the Arab vendors squatting beside their wares: dates, oranges, bread, rude straw and leather work, Jerusalem artichokes, meats, coarse clothing; and over all are the odours which explain how the Orient annihilates one smell by providing another still stronger. Perfumes in the East take the place of the soap of the West.

As soon as the sun has set, myriads of electric lights, that familiar anachronism of the twentieth century, punctuate the sudden twilight. The narrow streets that lead into the market-place, with their dingy houses and mysterious balconies, become alive with a jostling humanity. Dancing-girls, in gorgeous Oriental finery, made in Manchester, stroll up and down the ill-paved streets, ogling the passers-by with their bold, beautiful eyes, jingling their heavy silver bangles and anklets, and giving samples of a wriggle which consti-

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tutes their Art. The air is rent by a banging of tom-toms, screeching of native flutes, and scratching of fiddles, to lure the tripper into the coffee-houses to see the dancing.

The Arab coffee-house is usually not very large, low of ceiling, and overheated by a stove on which the coffee is brewed. At the far end is a platform where a tom-tom, a flute, and a fiddle keep up an unearthly din. And behind them the dancing-girls sit against the wall, each waiting her turn to come down and dance in the little space left vacant in the middle of the room after the Arabs and trippers have crowded in.

The dance is always the same monotonous wriggle, sometimes accompanied by a monotonous chant in a voice of brass. And over all is the fragrance of unassorted humanity, musk, coffee, and bad tobacco smoke. The places of honour are on the wooden benches nearest the dancer, and these are always occupied by trippers in search of the proper thing to do, piloted by Arab guides. Usually they are blameless British matrons accompanied by their daughters.

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The British matron abroad is a study in inconsistency. Her article of faith is—that to be frivolous on foreign soil is not to be frivolous at all. Therefore it is with a good conscience that, when she is in Biskra, she invests ten pence in a cup of muddy coffee, and gets the bad air, the wooden bench and the dancing-girls thrown in.

In the chaos of narrow streets near the market-place there is only one dark corner which, because of the blaze of electric lights about, makes it conspicuous. Here is also a coffee-house, but it is only lighted by two dim oil lamps that swing from the low, dirty ceiling. There is no maddening music, nor do the dancing-girls stroll past, arm in arm, jingling their eternal bangles and anklets. Instead, the dingy floor is crowded by sober-looking Arabs sitting on mats and sipping coffee, while they listen with solemn attention to an old, white-bearded Arab with deep-set eyes and a hook nose, who sits cross-legged on a low platform in their midst, and reads with shrill, dramatic fervour out of a dog-eared, greasy book. He holds it in one hand like a claw, while with

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the other he follows the Arabic text with a lighted taper. And as their forefathers listened to "The Arabian Nights" so they now listen. They hang on his words, and in the very same places, probably, murmur the same guttural approval. A whole literature in one immortal book!

It was in Biskra that the most subtly differentiated appeal to the spirits of three of the greatest nations on earth was thrust into my hand, by a stately Arab touting for a Biskra photographer, who combined photography and camels. That is, he not only let out camels, but he was also prepared to photograph the aspiring tripper in company of the "Ships of the Desert."

It was a shabby pink leaflet divided into three columns. In the English column stress was principally laid on the cheapness of camel excursions. There was no appeal to the poetry latent in the British breast. In the French column, Gallic imagination was fired by a poetic description of the fascinations of a camel ride in the desert, and in the third the German tripper was implored to mount the noble and good

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camel and have his photograph so taken for the joy of the dear ones at home. I must confess that I was quite ashamed of the British appeal, as if the Orient, in the person of the camel photographer, had found us out in all our innate prose.

I have never before studied the camel at home. The first time we met he was kneeling before the Biskra railway station giving vent to the most appalling roars which, on inquiry, were found to express his distaste for a miscellaneous cargo which was being strapped all over him. But this accomplished he got up by instalments, shut his great jaws and, being an Oriental, resigned himself to Fate. I then found that the other camels of the caravan were limping about on three legs, one being doubled up and bound; this was the practical Arab precaution against their straying.

Whatever he has when in foreign parts, the camel when at home has fleas, and his hide looks as if it had been the favourite camping-ground for generations of moths. Still, there is about him a haughty and supercilious air, quite out of keeping with

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his monumental shabbiness, which gives him a singular family resemblance to the worthy Arab in rags, who follows behind and prods the good beast in that part of his anatomy most susceptible to prods. Argument is of no avail with a camel. He has, too, that suspicious eye and the obstinate chin of one who has a very great grievance against the world. After some study I discovered the cause. It was a little one-horse tram that, once an hour, jingles its way cheerfully into the desert.

Biskra's tributes to the march of Progress are two little tram lines that meet at right angle just beyond the Royal and its dazzling white arcades. From the slender turret over these the flag of a different nationality floats every day as a delicate compliment to the confusion of tongues in the streets below.

One tram is bound to Old Biskra and the other jogs into the desert where, after four miles of placid rumbling, it reaches Chaude Fontaine, a watering-place of one house that leans up against a sand-hill. Here the tripper can get either an excellent lunch or an ill-

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smelling sulphur bath. It is, however, the sight of the tram drawn by a lean Arab steed, which upsets all received traditions as to the love of the Arab for his horse, that has, evidently, soured the camel's disposition. For he has to admit that Progress, in the shape of an oblong box and the lean horse, has left him far behind.

The tram to Chaude Fontaine always contains a chaotic mixture of humanity. The passengers consist chiefly of superior and solemn Arabs in their voluminous *burnous*, elderly English ladies with disguised bath towels in shawl straps, on their way to a sulphur bath, and Arab females whom the Prophet in his mercy has forbidden to unveil. Usually, too, an Englishman in a pith helmet and a pugaree, has several ladies in tow, who are, apparently, his harem, for it is impossible to discover to which one he legally belongs. A couple of French soldiers, in red harem trousers, are sure to be on the back platform, smoking cigarettes in company of one or two Kabyle dancing-girls with delicate tattooed foreheads, tragic black eyes, and splendid in those brilliant aniline dyes warranted

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not to wash, which the canny West now bestows on the inoffensive East.

So laden the tram leaps across the yellow sands of the desert to Chaude Fontaine, behind which the hills lie as flat against the horizon as the painted hills at Earl's Court. Past Nomad encampments of low, dirty tents of a coarse striped material that allow a passing glimpse into the weird, wild interior, which prove how little man, in a normal condition, requires to make him contented.

The tram is the last indignity that Progress offers to the camel when it leaves him and his saddle-bags, and the little boy who prods him in his sensitive rear, far behind. Heaven knows what the camels think as they see that accursed invention pull neatly up before the door of Chaude Fontaine.

It was long after the arrival of the tram that a caravan of five camels might have been seen winding in and out of the desert, also bound for Chaude Fontaine, with a load of five shaken foreign tourists who, it must be confessed, were a blot on the landscape.

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Who can describe the gait of a camel! It is a motion which tries not so much the human heart as the human stomach. One can only advise the sufferer about to mount to close his eyes, while something like an earthquake convulses first the hind legs and then the fore legs of his camel. Whereupon the martyr on top, having with tightly closed eyes resigned himself to destruction, opens them slowly, with a feeling that his head has been bumping against the eternal stars. Having discovered that he is still alive he resigns himself to fate and leaves his destiny in charge of a little Arab urchin, who thumps the camel behind.

The camel at home is a study in obstinacy. He walks into obstacles with a lordly indifference to the sufferings of the timid tripper on top. Reins are of no earthly use, for they only cause the camel to turn his head as if on a slow pivot, and to bestow a contemptuous glare at the rash being in a pith helmet, or a motor-veil, who is sawing away at his cast-iron jaws for dear life, with a countenance pea-green from internal suffering. If inclined to be playful

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he gives a nip at such toes as are within easy reach of his great jaws.

To dismount from a camel, one's advice is the same—that is, close your eyes and trust to Allah. But the process is reversed, for the camel doubles up his front legs first and then ties his hind legs in a double bow-knot, followed again by an earthquake, upon which the victim, opening his eyes, falls into the arms of the nearest bystander and revives slowly, dizzy but undamaged. The emotions of the camel are unrecorded.

Having dismounted from our five camels, in various stages of collapse, we were received at the porch of the hostel of Chaude Fontaine by a group of unsympathetic Arabs squatting about the entrance. We reeled past them through a brick corridor towards an Arab variety of an English coffee-room. In it by some strange freak of fate, stranded in the desert, stood a Chesterfield sofa, and in the corner of the Chesterfield sat a very sulky young Englishman in the latest thing in London clothes.

His clothes fitted so well and he was

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so good-looking, that the three of us who were feminine noticed it at a glance. Of the two of us who were masculine, one was long, lank, young and fair, and still suffering from the camel, while the other, more impervious to the gait of the camel, had gone in search of lunch.

Outside was the desert, the tram and the camels, and inside was the sulky young man. And so we watched him as being more interesting, while he in turn was occupied in eluding the attentions of a small, fluffy, yellow puppy who was making frantic efforts to jump into his lap.

Just as the grumpy young man seemed to grow restive under our united glances, there floated into the room a young Diana in a blue cotton frock buttoned behind. She was as slender as a reed, and her eyes were the grey that turns black, and her small head was covered with smooth hair, black and glossy as a raven's wing and twisted about her head in a plait, while over each ear there bobbed a little bunch of short black curls.

She held a pack of playing-cards in one hand, and, quite oblivious of us, she flung

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herself down beside the sulky young man and said in English, in broken and enchanting entreaty:

“ Pleeze, let me tell you’ fortune by ze cards.”

“ Bother ! ” said the young man.

We were all stirred to our depths. We could not believe our ears. Our youngest, although still suffering from the camel, threw a baleful glance across at the Chesterfield, and muttered “ Beast ! ”

Who was she ? She was very bewitching. Was fortune-telling her business ? Our British sense of propriety was somewhat startled by the free way in which she flung herself down beside the sulky one. Anyhow, she seemed to have made a mistake, for he wriggled himself free from the slim, olive hand on his immaculate sleeve, shook off the yellow puppy that had nearly climbed up to his knee, then rose and stalked grimly out of the room.

The enchantress picked up the yellow puppy that had tumbled on its fluffy back, and they both stared reproachfully at the door.

“ Beast ! ” I again heard our youngest

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mutter. Then, struggling with British shyness, to the amazement of a British sister and cousin, and probably to his own, he stepped forward, as if impelled by a higher power with a prod, and said to the enchantress, while he blushed painfully to the roots of his yellow hair :

“ I say ! If he won't, I will. I'd like my fortune told—by you.”

She stared at him with two perplexed eyes.

“ I no tell ze fortune of all peoples,” she said shyly, and rested her chin on the fluffy head of the puppy. “ I on'y tell ze fortune of my 'usband. Dat is my 'usband. My 'usband 'ave ze toozache.”

The ingenuous countenance of our youngest was a study in unpleasant emotions.

“ 'E Engleech. Vere nice Engleech—but 'is toozache vere bad. Zis is my leetle dawg. 'E vere naughty. 'E eat my slippare. Il est Arabe. I am Spanish. From Sevilla.”

“ How can he think of toothache when he looks into her eyes ! ” the youngest murmured gloomily to me.

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“No man can be in love if he has the toothache,” I assured him.

“Beast!” our youngest repeated, and that seemed to afford him relief.

But the ice being broken, the enchantress and the yellow puppy cuddled into the corner of the Chesterfield, and she favoured us with unreticent samples of her family history. The British sister and the British cousin listened spellbound, while our youngest stared at her with an inflammable stare. The smell of approaching lunch appealed only to me. I was famished.

“I am but jost mar-ri-ed,” the enchantress explained. “To ze chentlemans wiz ze toozache. I am a actrice. I ’ave been actrice ten year. I lof my teatre mor’n my ’usband.”

“O, you mustn’t say that!” the British cousin exclaimed, fearfully shocked.

“How old are you?” I interposed hastily.

“Vere ol’,” she replied, with an elderly shake of the little black curls, “I ’ave eighteen year.”

“And where do you play?” the British sister—who confesses to thirty-five—asked respectfully.

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“Paris,” and the enchantress stared as one who knows of no other city in the world. “I ’ave play wiz ze great Sara, I ’ave dance pour Polaire. All Paris know me. I am ze talk of ze town.”

We all held our breath. We were face to face with unknown experiences. And she was only eighteen.

“I ’ave took ze premier prix pour tragedy at ze Conservatoire,” and she rocked the yellow puppy.

The youngest turned pink with excitement. He himself was fearfully gone on private theatricals. So to meet the first prize for tragedy of the Paris Conservatoire was an experience. He quite gasped. And that of course explained the artistic line of black on her lovely white eyelids.

“My muzzer is ze most beautiful woman in Paris,” the enchantress continued proudly. “She spend millions—millions. I ’ave ’ad five papas. It is vere expensif to marry my muzzer. My new papa is a prince in Russie. My muzzer write she vere tired of my new papa. But ’e ’ave millions—millions,” and she stretched out her slim arms to express inexhaustible wealth.

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“ My muzzer, she only wear sable an’ ermine an’ pearls. *Ciel ! qu’elle est belle !* ”

“ Ask her how long she has been married,” our youngest prompted me.

I could hear the luncheon shuffling down the brick corridor, preceded by a delicious fragrance.

“ We ’ave been mar-ri-ed two week,” she said. “ We ’ave—what d’you call him—e-lo-ped from Paris. *C’est bon pour la réclame.* Ze two weeks vere long,” and she rubbed her chin thoughtfully up and down the puppy’s back. “ I ’ave bought ze leettle dawg for company, an’ ’e ’ave bought ’imself a leettle camel. An’ now ’e ’ave ze toozache an’ ze leettle camel, ’e no more lof me,” and her eyes grew misty with tragedy.

What our youngest would have done I can’t imagine had not, fortunately, at that very moment, the luncheon appeared in the uplifted hands of two Arabs, followed by the sulky one with the toothache, who only brightened at sight of a young gazelle—roasted. From that moment I was relieved to see that they both cheered visibly, and the sulky one became quite reconciled to

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us. Indeed, by the time our camels were prodded up to the door, they quite clung to us and implored us to stay.

Then they tried their best to coax us to come back. The enchantress, with a tragic pout, said she was tired to death of the yellow puppy, and he said he was tired of his camel. Both agreed that they were sick of the desert, the Arabs, the cooking, and the sulphur baths. They were homesick for Paris. They hoped never to see a camel again. But they did not dare to go back to Paris—yet, they confessed in two separate corners, because although it was certainly *réclame*, it was the wrong kind of *réclame*. Once you elope you must, if only for the sake of decency, stay more than two weeks.

He took me aside and apologised handsomely for his sulkiness. The toothache, the desert, and no society to speak of, had got on his nerves. Indeed, I heard him say quite hopefully—not to say eagerly—as I closed my eyes preparatory to my camel's going into a convulsion, that he thought the enchantress was uncommonly like her mother.

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Just as I pondered, with tightly closed eyes, over this cryptic remark, the camel roared in anguish, there was an upheaval, and, when I ventured to open my eyes again, my camel, having once more resigned himself to the Inevitable, was jogging placidly behind the camel of our youngest.

At the risk of depriving my camel of its customer, I heroically looked back to where the enchantress, with the puppy and the sulky one, stood on the steps and looked after us, disconsolate and forlorn. Our youngest, equally heroic, also looked back to get the last glimpse of that enchanting cotton frock buttoned behind. The blue back shrugged itself into the house with the puppy wriggling its head on her slim shoulder, and the sulky one, with his hands plunged in his pockets, stalked round the corner, in an opposite direction, to find consolation in his little camel.

My own camel, not having been prodded for fully a minute, was proceeding in his own stately way in the wrong direction. I pulled frantically at his reins, the Arab infant behind dug into his sensitive rear, and the stately Moor, under whose guidance

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we were disfiguring the desert, roared at him the choicest swear words of the Koran.

The result was satisfactory, and we again plodded in single file towards Biskra.

Having conquered my camel my thoughts reverted to the sulky young man and his mysterious remark. Why had he said so hopefully that he thought she was like her mother? But, just then, as I pondered over these things, the camel of our youngest swung round and entered into a cantankerous argument with my camel, with an appalling display of great yellow teeth and pendulous tongue. By the aid of more Koran and more stick our two camels were torn apart.

The youngest, having regained his place in the procession, looked back with a gloomy face red with the exertion of subduing the primal beast.

"The honeymoon," I said to him over the bobbing head of my camel, "is the mistake of two. No less than three should ever go on a honeymoon."

"If ever I go on a honeymoon," he retorted, as his camel looked back with a

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malevolent grin, "g'long, you beast!—I shall go alone."

"Go alone by all means," I assented breathlessly, for my camel, without any warning, had broken into an awful trot like a nightmare, "that's best; but mind you don't ever go alone with Her. Here, stop!" I shrieked to the Ship of the Desert, and finally he permitted me to pull up next to our youngest, who received me gloomily.

"I wonder," I asked, seeking for information, "I wonder if people ever take to eloping as they do, say, to drink?"

"Why?" he asked shortly, for his camel had used up his breath.

"Because he seemed so pleased and hopeful when he said he thought she was like her mother."

"Hopeful of what? The Beast!"

"Of her eloping."

"Oh!"

"Her mother has already eloped five times; she told me so when she took me on the roof. Perhaps he thinks she has inherited the tendency. And I shouldn't be surprised," I added, as my camel side-

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skidded into a dry ditch, " I shouldn't be surprised if she had."

It was just at sunset that five unwilling camels, mounted by five exhausted foreigners, could have been seen plodding slowly out of the desert towards Biskra. A jingling one-horse tram rubbed shoulders with them, then brushed gaily past and left them far behind. So does Progress give a black eye to a lagging civilization.

Just as they reached Biskra the Union Jack on the roof of the Royal saluted the setting sun, and in the sudden twilight one end of the long, dusty road was still aglow with its radiance while the other had already faded into the darkness of night. And from the Arab quarter could be heard the banging of tom-toms, the screech of the flutes, and the scratching of fiddles.



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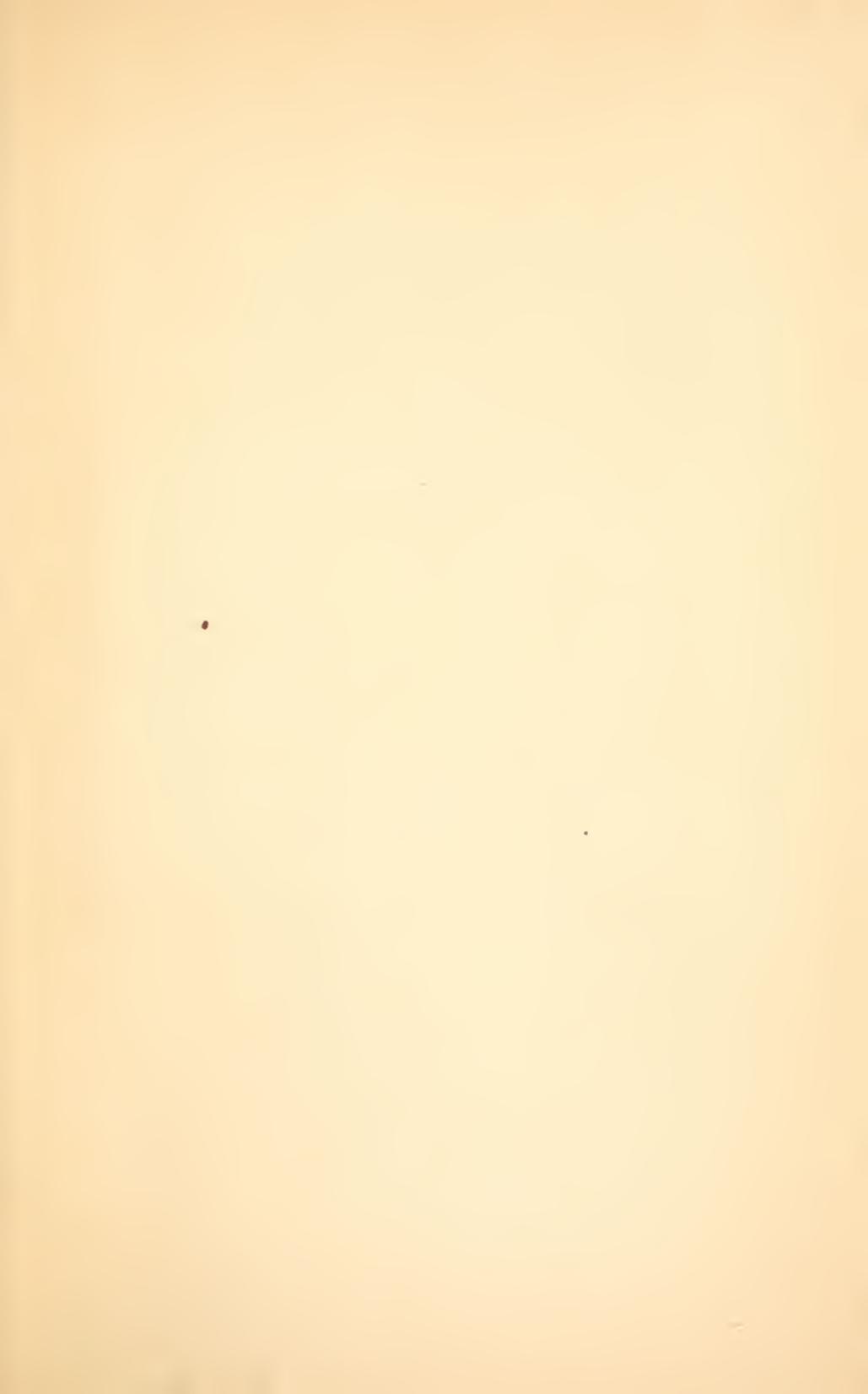
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